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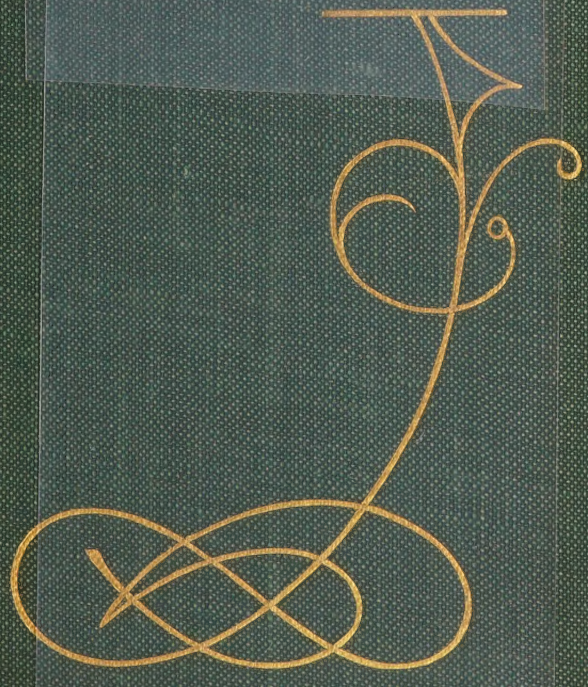
O
THE
SELF-
SUFFICIENT



BY



J. M. STUART-YOUNG





OSRAC



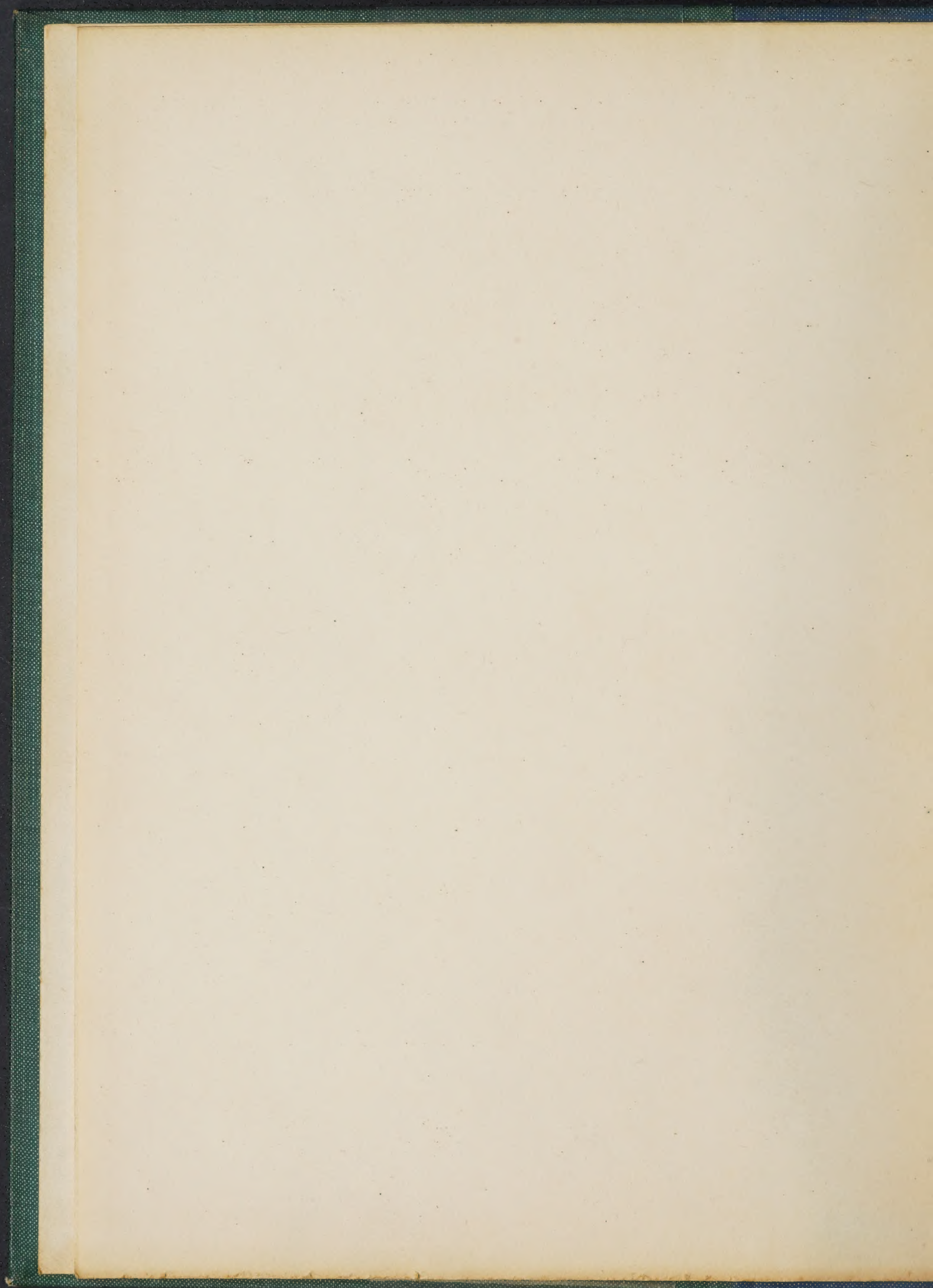






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OSRAC, THE
SELF-
SUFFICIENT.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR—

MINOR MELODIES.

IMPRESSIONS.

MERELY A NEGRESS.

THE AFTER-LIFE.



THE AUTHOR (1905).

OSCAR, THE
SELF-SUFFICIENT,

AND

OTHER POEMS,

WITH

A MEMOIR OF

THE LATE OSCAR WILDE.

(Portraits and fac-simile letters).

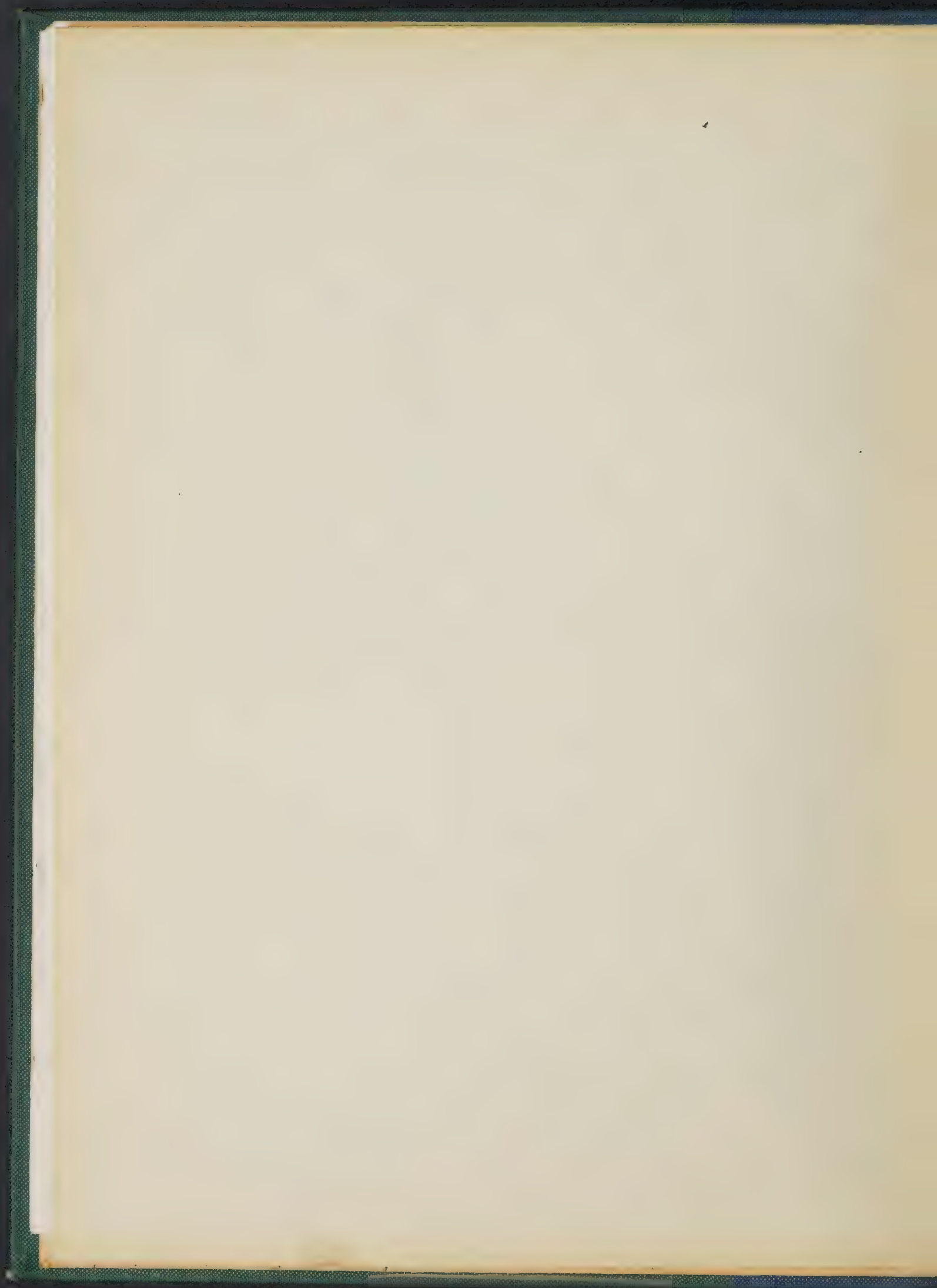
BY

J. M. STUART-YOUNG.

*"You poisoned me with a book once, . . . Promise
me that you will never lend that book to anyone. It does
harm."—DORIAN GRAY.*

LONDON :
THE HERMES PRESS,
CECIL COURT, ST. MARTIN'S LANE,
1905.

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To the Memory

of

OSCAR WILDE,

Playwright and Man of Letters.

Born, Dublin, October 16th, 1856.

Died, Paris, November 30th, 1900.

"Only the beautiful is the true."

"Rien n'est vrai que le beau."



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Oscar Wilde.

to Johnnie

September 1894

OSCAR WILDE.

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I.

"He has been greatly depressed in prison, and looks back upon the last three years as a hideous dream." Vide letter from the late Constance Wilde.

❧ ❧ ❧ There can be no doubt that the intoxication of success had turned his brain, and made him more than usually reckless of public opinion. The art of leaving the stage of life at the apropos moment has yet to be taught. To those who knew him intimately during the years of his prosperity, the climax in the career of Oscar Wilde seemed unavoidable. The aberration which brought his splendid life to ruins, and which had ruled him since childhood, was known only to the favoured few ; and it is one of my fondest recollections that I appreciated the work and the personality of Oscar in his hey-day.

OSCAR WILDE :

☪ ☪ ☪ "Super-sensitiveness" is a malady with which we are all familiar. The horny-handed navvy seems to be no more immune than the dainty lady in her boudoir ; and Oscar Wilde became in his later years the willing slave of morbidity. Only the psychologist can fully understand such contrariety of morals as he demonstrated. In writing of him I dare not deny the neurosis which actuated him during the years of our friendship ; but I was never by any word or act of his urged to evil ; and I can honestly declare that he was to me the acme of purity and gentleness. Our conversation was always free, but never by any chance tinged with obscenity ; and he had the most sincere feeling of disgust for Rabelaisian stories, and always keenly expressed his aversion from doubtful humour. I saw, none the less—and only too clearly—that he was diseased in the will, and that he lacked the desire to be strong and healthy-minded. But I was only a youth, and dare not have presumed to admonish or reprove. Human nature is builded upon two potential instincts,—the predilection for the preservation of the ego, and the appetency for the propagation of the race. In Oscar Wilde these instincts had become perverted, and the will was sadly corrupted. So that the culminating point in his career was the inevitable one.

♣ ♣ ♣ It has been suggested that health ought more fittingly to be catching than disease. In the world of

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letters health and saneness of outlook are catching ; just as much as moral leprosy can be disseminated by a suggestive book. Character is contagious, and pleasurable emotion is prevalent. And it is just because the books of Oscar Wilde are so terribly real in their delineation of his attributes that I value them so highly. Each one is impregnated with his evasive character and strange genius. The creed of Wilde is summed up in his own words from the witness box at the Central Criminal Court of London on Thursday, April 4th, 1895 :

❧ ❧ ❧ " In writing I do not consider in any degree the effect of creating or exciting either morality or immorality ; I aim neither at good nor evil. I simply endeavour to make a thing with some quality of beauty. There can be neither morality nor immorality in Art. Either a thing is done well or it is done ill. . . . To reach the reality of self is the principal aim in life, and to arrive at this state of consciousness through pleasure is finer than through pain. An individual truth ceases to be truth when it is followed by a crowd. What is truth, you ask ? It is something so personal as to be only a reality to the person who holds it . . . A man can never be judged by an accepted code of ethics. Each soul has its own laws. . . . I never give adoration to anyone except myself."

OSCAR WILDE :

☪ ☪ ☪ It is a tremendous day in the history of a man
when he realises the truth of the saying, "To the pure,
all things are pure." Sin is individual, and morality a
condition of the mind.

♣ ♣ ♣ " I know not whether Laws be right,
Or whether Laws be wrong :
All that we know who lie in gaol
Is that the wall is strong ;
And that each day is like a year,
A year whose days are long.

🌀 🌀 🌀 But this I know, that every Law
That men have made for Man,
Since first Man took his brother's life,
And the sad world began,
But straws the wheat and saves the chaff
With a most evil fan.

☪ ☪ ☪ This too I know—and wise it were
If each could know the same—
That every prison that men build
Is built with bricks of shame,
And bound with bars lest Christ should see
How men their brothers maim.

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♣ ♣ ♣ With bars they blur the gracious moon,
And blind the goodly sun :
And they do well to hide their Hell,
For in it things are done
That Son of God nor son of Man
Ever should look upon ! ”

❧ ❧ ❧ What a cry from the depths ! I saw him first in 1894. I had for many months felt strangely impressed by his work, and certain of his poems haunted me. He was then acknowledged to be one of our most promising playwrights, and “ Lady Windermere’s Fan ” had captivated the critics. I was budding fifteen, and worshipped him as I worshipped many of his contemporaries—poets of the younger generation : Richard le Gallienne, Stephen Phillips, William Butler Yeats, Laurence Binyon, and Arthur Symonds,—but with this difference : there was something aroused within me, by the rhymes of Oscar Wilde, which savoured more of astheny than robustness. I was curious to meet him ; and here reproduce the letter he sent to me in reply to my boyish expressions of admiration. Unfortunately I have only retained a few of his epistles.

☞ ☞ ☞ “ My own Jack,—

“ Your letters are always pleasing, and you seem to look at life with eyes of rose and violet. I often think

My own Jack

Your letters
are always pleasing, and
you seem to look at life
with eyes of rose and violet.
(I often think of you in
your brown-draped town,
tinging the murky day with
your meditations upon
the influence of Art: but
you have your dpal mornings.

When do you come to
London, my pride?— I am
very busy, however time
can ever be spared for you,
and my new play goes well.
It has amazed society. Come
and see me, and we can go
together. nobody need know.
They tell me I look younger
every day: how delightful
this is! You grow older
Jack, whilst I become

younger.

I am glad you are
enjoying the Poems. My new
book you will have in a
few weeks - when do you
go to Salisbury - it will be
a great pleasure for me to
take you. I wish you were
near me more frequently.

Write and tell me
all the news.

I am tired out -
come soon to London and
see me.

Dear

OSCAR WILDE :

of you in your brown-draped town, tingeing the murky day with meditations upon the influence of Art ; but you have your opal mornings.

" When do you come to London my pride ? I am very busy : However, time can ever be spared for you, and my new play goes well. It has amazed Society. Come and see me and we can go together. Nobody need know. They tell me I look younger every day ; how delightful this is ! You grow older Jack, whilst I become younger.

" I am glad you are enjoying the poems. My new book you will have in a few weeks. When do you go to Salisbury ? It will be a great pleasure for me to take you. I wish you were near me more frequently.

" Write and tell me all the news. I am tired out ; come soon to London and see me. OSCAR."

♣ ♣ ♣ It would not be fitting to here quote the whole of his letters to me, and the diffident method of publication which I have adopted for this volume is assumed because of my respect for the poet's children. The unjust opprobrium, which has been heaped upon the name of those two boys, I would be the last to increase ; and my aim is purely literary and æsthetic in thus studying the friendship of one of the most incomparable sonneteers since the days of Keats. I repeat only a few sentences of special interest.

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❧ ❧ ❧ "What shall we talk about? Tolstoi and his theory of celibacy, or Ibsen's latest play? But I forgot. You know nothing of these wicked people,—and yet you profess to admire my Charmides! Young deceiver, dreamily wandering among shadows, and recking little of the actualities of life. Now: here is a youth, passionately attached to a man of the world, and he only knows him through the medium of his books! But there is one potent element of satisfaction to me in your paradoxical admiration,—you know me at my worst. Only the sinner knows how to write virtuously. And in after years if you are inclined to reproach yourself with idiocy, you will remember that a genius compelled you to pose as one of the fools. The man or woman who is afraid of jeopardising the reason in the pursuit of Art is accepting a paltry mess of pottage (Nature's commonplace birthright) in exchange for the possibilities of joys inconceivable."

❧ ❧ ❧ "Marriage? Connubial bliss is sure to become tedious when one enjoys it every day. No marriage has been contracted yet where the man was not the loser; and if he be gifted, the heavier must be the toll he pays to Eros. You have quoted from one of my letters (an unpardonable offence) and say (maliciously) that no woman could receive such tender nothings without a qualm of misgiving. The pastoral mind

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muses deeply upon this paradox. Deliciously impressible and convincing as you deem them, I can only tell you that no true poet would pluck a flower half-blown. Should it not grow to maturity first? Little flowers bleed so piteously! Poor passionate little blossoms . . . !"

✦ ✦ ✦ "The thought of progenitiveness makes your sensitive soul shudder? Poor Jack! You become more absurd every day,—and dearer. And I love children too. After all the common drab necessity of propagation . . ."

✦ ✦ ✦ "I do wish you would not name these fellows. Wretched frail mortals, eager only for monetary gains, and caring naught for the haze of things æsthetic. The beautiful is inseparable from the strong. Do not be weak, or I shall love you less."

☪ ☪ ☪ "Who can say that I forget, or that I am not you? That is not a quotation nor an attempt at verse, but the expression of a passing humour. For only the beautiful is the true."

✦ ✦ ✦ I make no attempt to elucidate the extracts given above: but have quoted them as being worth pages of description of Oscar Wilde's characteristics. In June, 1894, I visited him in London, and had the prerogative of listening to his conversation over dinner at the Savoy. His letters had ill-prepared me for the sparkling stream of epigram and satirical wit to which I was privileged to

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listen. There was present, besides myself and Wilde, a young man of about twenty, whom he introduced as "Freddy" Atkins. He seemed to be somewhat embarrassed by our conversation, for with my serious precociousness I insisted upon discussing Art and literature. Wilde must have found me vastly amusing, and I was in the Seventh Heaven of delight. I recall one remark with the poignancy of regret: "You are quite refreshing Jack. If I only had a boy of your calibre near me oftener, I might be a better man."

❧ ❧ ❧ His conversation was brilliant and epigrammatic in the extreme. He was a wonderful talker, and even before such a mean audience as myself and "Freddy" Atkins (whom I afterwards learned was a youth with yearnings for music-hall life) he exerted himself to please and interest. I can see him now, leaning over the table, his face alive with mirth, and his eyes gleaming, while he poured forth a torrent of paradox, which must have been Greek to one—if not to both of his listeners. I remember that he was wearing a priceless fur-lined overcoat, and a blue tie, with a diamond pin. He was tall and rather bloated-looking, his face clean shaven, and his fingers glittering with fine rings. I thanked the waiter for his attention to us at the close of the meal, and he said to me in a friendly fashion: "Never thank anyone for what has been paid for, *mon petit ami*." I can only

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believe that this cynicism was assumed, for at heart he was a democrat.

☪ ☪ ☪ We went to the Haymarket after dinner, and he had my hand clasped within his all the evening. When a more than usually happy aphorism had been uttered by the players he would turn to me for approval, and I recall his manifest pleasure when I repeated a few of the lines between the acts. "The book of life begins with a man and woman in a garden and ends—with Revelations," I murmured ; and he dilated upon the care which had been expended upon this bon mot. We walked the Strand till midnight, and Atkins returned to his home about that time. Then Oscar accompanied me to the station, and seemed loth to part with me. We promised to write regularly, and as the train was steaming out of the station he waved his hand, and cried : "To the see again. For we are to be friends you know." The journey to Manchester was a remarkably short one (or so it appeared to me) for my mind was absolutely be-mused by the glamour of his presence.



THE AUTHOR IN 1895.

"Les jaloux, Madame, sont comme ceux qui perdent leur procès ; ils ont permission de tout dire."

—Molière.

II.

✠ ✠ ✠ In March, 1895—little did I dream how imminent was the end of Wilde's meteoric career—I saw him frequently, and we visited Little College Street in company. No breath of immorality (if one excepts the freedom of his letters) had reached me through our intimacy as yet, though,—and if we are to believe the evidence of his trial, and accept the gross interpretation placed upon his letters to Alfred Douglas, the "Salisbury" bait had been offered to me—he had shown unmistakable signs of amour in my company. Public sentiment is rarely logical. It has since been pointed out to me that Pierre Loti used Oscar's letter to Lord Alfred Douglas as the basis of a fine sonnet. Salisbury Cathedral, with its unique Gothic front, was one of the poet's pet haunts, and I have never read his letters as allegories to cover obscene suggestions.

✠ ✠ ✠ I recall the æsthetic pleasure and luxury of the cosy room, hung with heavy green curtains, with something of the old thrill. The air was heavily scented, and

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candles were burning on the mantelpiece. I forget the names of all present, but Douglas, Scarfe and Mavor are three out of the number.

☪ ☪ ☪ The man who was two months later branded as a sinner of the most horrible type, exerted over me that night the most helpful influence. I was a morbid youth, inclined more to seclusion, than to merriment and company, and his friendly banter roused me to some semblance of the freedom and irresponsibility of boyishness. Had he been as bad as the public have been led to conceive him, that night would have been the initial step towards my destruction. For I offered no protest to his influence. I let myself drift in the pleasure of the Now, questioning not the Afterward. Wilde was exuberant, talkative, and happy ; and his hearers listened entranced to his conversation.

♣ ♣ ♣ The case needs no re-capitulation. He must have been contemplating at this time the trouble which ensued, for a copy of " The Green Carnation " which he found upon the table, made him turn upon Taylor in most violent anger, and accuse him of treachery. He declared that Taylor was flaunting the book before his friends to degrade him in their minds. I asked him for particulars, and he told me something about the incidents

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which had led to its publication. The author of the novel had ingratiated himself into the friendship of Lord Alfred Douglas in Cairo, and accumulated his materials. The resultant story had greatly incensed Wilde, and he forbade me to read the book at any cost. The contemptuous terms in which he then spoke of journalists lends some colour to the after-events; for I greatly wondered at the time of the scandal why the press should be so bitter in its denunciations.

❧ ❧ ❧ On the 3rd of April the trial of the Marquis of Queensberry for slander opened at London, and the prosecution collapsed on Friday the 5th. Oscar Wilde was arrested the same night at half-past-six. In murky Manchester I had followed the case with intense interest, vaguely frightened, vaguely ashamed. At the moment that the last edition of the local paper reached my hands, Wilde, Douglas and others were seated in a little hotel (I think it was the Cadogan Arms) smoking and drinking. Immediately the arrest took place he must have instantly recognised that the end had come. The days that followed were days of anguish to me. I was too young to recognise the weighty import of the trial, nor do I wish to condemn him now. I remember only how I had admired him, and that not one soul would sympathise with his distress.

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☪ ☪ ☪ But why dwell upon morbid details? My
riper knowledge, and my experience of public-school
morality teach me that Oscar was more of a victim than
a culprit : and I may not forget that he was the only
one punished from out of twenty or more sinners.

*Les langues ont toujours du venin à répandre
Et rien n'est ici-bas s'en puisse défendre.*

—Molière.

III.

♣ ♣ ♣ I look upon Oscar Wilde's art as strenuously suicidal. He went to his fate gallantly, with bravado, eyes open to the future. When I turn to the pages of "Dorian Gray" and read the extracts quoted below : and then recall the author's cynical remark "A clever man dare do anything," I am almost surprised that circumstantial evidence did not snare him years before the Queensberry scandal.

❧ ❧ ❧ Hallward the artist is speaking : "
Every gentleman is interested in his good name. You don't want people to talk of you as something vile and degraded. Of course, you have your position, and your wealth, and all that kind of thing. But position and wealth are not everything. . . . Sin is a thing that writes itself across a man's face. It cannot be concealed. People talk of secret vices. There are no such things as secret vices. If a wretched man has a

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vice, it shows itself in the lines of the mouth, the droop of the eyelids, the moulding of the hands even."

☪ ☪ ☪ The crux of Wilde's genius lies in this wonderful book. No wonder that every man's hand was against it. Yet even his bitterest detractors must surely feel some thrill of admiration for its courage, the splendour of its imagery, and the sweep of its style. Perhaps our children's children will appreciate where we reproach, for there can be no subject nearer to the heart of man than that of the relation of members of the one sex : and the present conventional relations are far from being perfect. What a fine passage is this :—

♣ ♣ ♣ " There are few of us who have not sometimes wakened before dawn, either after one of those dreamless nights that make one almost enamoured of death, or one of those nights of horror and misshapen joy, when through the chambers of the brain sweep phantoms more terrible than reality itself, and instinct with that vivid life that lurks in all grotesques, and that lends to Gothic art its enduring vitality ; this art being one might fancy, especially the art of those whose minds have been troubled with the malady of reverie. Gradually white fingers creep through the curtains, and they appear to tremble. Black fantastic shadows crawl into the corners of the room, and crouch there. Outside, there is the stirring of birds among the leaves, or

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the sound of men going forth to their work, or the sigh and sob of the wind coming down from the hills and wandering round the silent house, as though it feared to wake the sleepers. Veil after veil of thin dusky gauze is lifted, and by degrees the forms and colours of things are restored to them, and we watch the dawn remarking the world in its antique pattern. The wan mirrors get back their mimic life."

❧ ❧ ❧ I have no desire to discuss the saneness of the outlook of "Dorian Gray." The materials are handled with superb—if mistaken—skill, and a noble purpose animates the book. After reading it, we can exclaim with the Author, in all sincerity: "Youth: there is nothing like it. It is absurd to talk of the ignorance of youth. The only opinions worth listening to are those of people younger than ourselves. Life has revealed to them her latest wonders."

❧ ❧ ❧ I am still able to think of our friendship with vigour and regret. He was a poet of the first water, exuberant, fantastic, tuneful. There was in him, as in his work, a suggestion of the unusual, the strange. I cannot help but think that those two years of sordid imprisonment prematurely killed him, and England has lost one of her most gifted singers. The crowd is not capable of judging a man's temperament, and he should have had a jury of literary confreres. Our poets are

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losing the true ideal,—the Beautiful. William Watson sings sweetly, but there is the clamorous note of political discontent in his songs, and his neat sense of epigram and his sudden satire are obscured by his unbelief. Kipling is hidden in the Imperialistic war-cloud, and will soon need to publish a glossary of his slang. Arthur Symonds becomes sickly sensuous. Yates is shadowy and intangible. Swinbourne is our greatest living poet, but his music is often thin. Edmund Gosse has ceased to soar. And Richard le Gallienne's passion is as unreal as it is assumed: he merely makes a pose. England is developing into the home of the middle-class.

♣ ♣ ♣ The morbid life of Oscar Wilde appears to me as the result of our social Philistinism. We did not understand his aims, and misconceived his Art. In most dramatists we have the grossness without the vice—the vulgarity without the passion. Any lewdness may be suggested so long as open avowal is withheld. Every music-hall song is impregnated with a sinister indecency which is revolting,—and yet we sniff at "The Picture of Dorian Gray." Art does not conceal,—it reveals. But I am inclined to think that modern wit has nothing to reveal, so simply makes a vulgar show of covering something which does not exist: except in the mind of the dramatist. The references to things sensual, in our modern plays and poems, are generally as stupid as the thoughts

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are gross. How we long for the refreshing avowal of a Wilde, instead of the inane puppet-play of Pinero's doll! English ladies, who would look askance at a Palais Royal farce, will shake their undraped shoulders in high glee at the suggestiveness of "A Wife without a Smile." The respectable middle-classes would not be seen with a volume of Oscar Wilde's keen epigram in their hands, and yet laugh heartedly at the tawdry and indecent anecdotage of our weekly journals: generally of a pink colour, but decidedly blue in their tendencies. And if a writer's sense of morality takes an erratic turn, or is coalesced in any audacious disregard of social rule, he is condemned as a filthy fellow. The sensuous pursuit of any pet theory of morals is the sin unabsolvable. The only present-day plea for daintiness is to pretend to be coarse.

“Les plus grandes âmes sont capable des plus grands vices, aussi bien que des plus grandes vertus.

—Descartes.

IV.

❧ ❧ ❧ I have never gone about the world with the eyes of the critic, and when I hunted up the poet, whose wild fancies had filled my years of adolescence with dreams, at his rooms in the Rue des Beaux Arts, a year after his release, I found him still the gentlemanly man of letters he had always been. I had prepared myself not to see anything lurid or dreadful : sin is individually relative, and Oscar Wilde's erotical nature was not so revolting as some superficial thinkers imagine. I thought only of the hideous confinement endured during the Autumn of 1895, all 1896, and the Spring of 1897, and of the gross round of duties he had been compelled to perform in his prison cell :

❧ ❧ ❧ “ We tore the tarry rope to shreds
With blunt and bleeding nails ;
We rubbed the doors, and scrubbed the floors,
And cleaned the shining rails ;
And rank by rank, we soaped the plank,
And clattered with the pails.

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♣ ♣ ♣ We sewed the sacks, we broke the stones,
We turned the dusty drill :
We banged the tins, and bawled the hymns,
And sweated on the mill :
But in the heart of every man
Terror was lying still."

—the living and sleeping in one small room, with white-washed walls, blank, hideous ; the denial of God's blessed sunshine, the utensils that had to be polished daily, the solitariness of confinement, the enforced attention at service, the insolent arrogance of warders, with "souls beneath the ken of things divine,"—and tears gathered thickly on my lashes as I ascended the stairs to his room.

❧ ❧ ❧ That he was poor I knew, and that he would have difficulty in continuing his literary career I guessed. At first I hesitated to knock. Then I heard him stirring within, and tapped gently. He opened the door himself, and at sight of his face—so piteous in its suffering, so anguished in its settled despair—I recoiled. The same stalwart figure, tall and commanding, but slightly bent, the hair tingeing into grey, and the forehead wrinkled with premature age ! But I held out my hand instantly, and said as steadily as I could, " May I shake your hand again, Mr. Wilde, as a token of my esteem and unchanged devotion ? " He drew me within without a word, and looked at me keenly. There was a tigerish gleam in his

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eyes, and I felt vaguely frightened and abashed. I have wondered since whether he had suffered thoughts of mad anger and revenge to thrill him whilst in Reading Gaol, and when looking backward at his trial? Did he blame those unscrupulous youths who took his gold, and then without a qualm, snapped at the hand that had fed them? But he had not forgotten me, and his welcome was as sincere as it was touching. So we sat beside the fire and talked.

☪ ☪ ☪ His face grew more animated as we conversed, and throughout it was lit up by a pleasant smile. His old lightness had not forsaken him, and he quoted from his essays with all the enthusiasm of earlier years. The manuscript of "The Ballad of Reading Gaol" lay upon his table, and I read several stanzas with growing appreciation. I asked him how he had fared, and he recounted the indignities to which he had been subjected. I spoke of the restfulness of his attaining the third stage, when lighter tasks would be apportioned to him, and he would become privileged to receive books. He stretched out a hand deprecatingly, and reminded me that his sentence had been one of "continuous" hard labour. "But the books," I protested. His voice was harsh when he replied :

♣ ♣ ♣ "Do not, I pray you," he cried. "Of what use to me was the namby-pamby stuff of Reading Gaol? During those first few weeks I lived in a Hell of thought.

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I have suffered almost all that a man can suffer,—except that (he pointed to the 'Ballad' lines 'The man had killed the thing he loved and so he had to die'), and I am inclined to the belief that we find our surest sense of life in poignant pain. The only real passions, whether they be pleasurable or tormenting, are frenzies of the brain. Feeling vanishes once it is realised. There are moments in the lives of all, when we become conscious of being but idle dolls in the hands of some strange incomprehensible Force—and my imprisonment has been one long chain of such terrible moments of consciousness."

❧ ❧ ❧ I doubt whether I should be right in giving expression to all his sentiments that night. But I give a few of his bon-mots. We were talking of Flaubert and Zola, and he expressed his high esteem of "Confessions de St. Antoine." Then he said :—

❧ ❧ ❧ "Zola is obsessed by the thought of gross things in life. He does not aim at Art but Revelation. He tries very hard to please us by the minuteness of his examinations, but only succeeds in producing a feeling of depression. He uses the most abject and filthy phrases. He is a washerwoman who delights in the weekly basket-full of soiled clothes, and the dirtier they are the better does he like the task. Indecent? It is a good thing to be wittily indecent: but it is a bad thing to be indecently stupid. When Zola talks of the nude (sa

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nudite de jolie fille) we think of the shapeless and flat-breasted housemaid, and never by any chance of the Venus de Milo. The method of his books reminds me of the country bumpkin one meets at the fair, with his eyes positively glued to the peephole of the 'Art' show, where 'Doctors are admitted free.' He is a worker among garbage."

♣ ♣ ♣ Of Arthur Symonds he said,—“ I greatly admire Symonds' work. He feels what he writes. But he is occasionally too sickly. He pants upon the breasts of his loves in a laboured effort to feel. He urges his passion, instead of permitting his passion to surge within him.”

🌿 🌿 🌿 I had been reading a great deal of George Moore during the winter of 1897, and I asked him for an opinion of “Spring Days.” He said,—“George Moore's novels are unbearable to a sensitive spirit. I always think of a grocer temporarily installed in the place of an artist. The artist has grown tired of the busy round of literary work, and for relaxation has changed places with the grocer. (Not such a bad idea, you young imp. Cease grinning). The grocer meanwhile sits at the desk of the artist, and pens modern stories of modern love : all impregnated with a suburban outlook, and smeared with the grease of ‘our best shilling per pound.’ He is capable of much better things.”

A MEMOIR.

☪ ☪ ☪ When I left him he was crooning softly over the fire, a cigarette between his lips. We had been talking as of old, and I had quoted several of my favourite pieces of imagery. I looked back at him, noting again the clear cut profile, the sunken forehead, the mobile mouth.

♣ ♣ ♣ He glanced round, and said musingly : " Good-bye, Jackie. Luck to you. Don't let my thoughts run away with you. Each soul is the centre of the universe, remember. High or low, rich or poor, each soul sees faults in its contemporaries. And the hunchback, deformed, hideous, is right in declaring his lack of esteem when he views the plaster-cast of Apollo. Don't altogether forget me in England."

☪ ☪ ☪ I did not see him again, nor do I know how he passed his last few months. His terrible mania was with him to the last. A few remained loyal to him, and his sad career ended in November, 1900. The news came as a relief to all who loved him. He demonstrated the same noble courage under his many privations, as had been evidenced by him during the terrible months of April and May, 1895. Since the sad day when the news of " Osrac's " death reached me, I have several times seen the young lord, whose egregious folly hastened the death of my friend. And society is thawing towards him. The same community that killed the man of genius is receiving

OSCAR WILDE : A MEMOIR.

into its arms again the more culpable prodigal. But then, "Volanti non fit injuria," or at least, so Society thinks.

☪ ☪ ☪ Let us realise how much of infinite pain, how much of soul-distraction went to make up the works of Oscar Wilde, and appreciate not condemn, sympathise not avoid. For he was an "artist"—an artist of originality—and such men have been rare in our prosaic age.

"Les préjugés sont la raison des sots."

—*Voltaire.*

V.

"DE PROFUNDIS."

♣ ♣ ♣ There is one consolation in retrospect upon sin. Even as all sensuous pleasures are doubled in anticipation, so the spiritual pleasures of repentance are enhanced by the knowledge that the offence has been a tangible one. A fig for your milksop who has never felt with Shakespeare such physical delight as is expressed in his sonnets,—

"Make sweet some vial ; treasure thou some place
With beauty's treasure, ere it be self-kill'd.

That use is not forbidden usury

Which happies those that pay the willing loan."

🌿 🌿 🌿 It is evening in my West African home, and the long shadows are falling athwart the sandy roads. The air is exquisite, and far away between the trees I can see the silvery sheen of the Atlantic. Before me lies the chiefest treasure of my fortnightly mails : "De Profundis"—the last cry from the depths of the poet's soul.

OSCAR WILDE :

I had read most of the pages in manuscript four years ago, but I realise a new thrill, an intenser delight as I turn over the leaves. The book is full of arrestive thoughts, and Oscar Wilde's personality throbs in every phrase. In art nothing succeeds like failure, and the social debacle of the poet has given to the world a splendid monument to his genius. Such a revelation as this is worth the terror and the pain.

☪ ☪ ☪ "I now see that sorrow, being the supreme emotion of which man is capable, is at once the type and test of all great art. What the artist is always looking for is the mode of existence in which soul and body are one and indivisible : in which the outward is expressive of the inward : in which form reveals. Of such modes of existence there are not a few : youth and the arts preoccupied with youth may serve as a model for us at one moment : at another we may like to think that, in its subtlety and sensitiveness of impression, its suggestion of a spirit dwelling in external things and making its raiment of earth and air, of mist and city alike, and in the morbid sympathy of its moods and tones and colours, modern landscape art is realising for us pictorially what was realised in such plastic perfection by the Greeks. Music, in which all subject is absorbed in expression and cannot be separated from it, is a complex example, and a flower or a child

A MEMOIR.

a simple example of what I mean ; but sorrow is the ultimate type both in life and art."

♣ ♣ ♣ From such a book as this the ordinary critic should stand aside. It is a human essay, poignant, tragic, fearful in the intensity of its realisation. A switch in time saves crime, as I can imagine the poet himself saying with a smile and a tear ; but his punishment came too late. In vain may the novelist, be he a Morrison, a Gorky or a France, endeavour to imagine the sensations of a man condemned to an eternal oblivion, ostracised by society, condemned by the world, hourly drinking at the fount of his own folly, and dissecting day by day his emotions and his unfleshed hopes. This manuscript is reality. People who live in glass houses (he said once to me) should pull down the blinds, or colour the glass effectively. And coupled with the sincerity of an all-pervading repentance, one sees here the old love of plastic language. The æsthetic appeal is as real as the emotional. For in his renunciation of the past, and the expression of his determination to lead a fuller and a nobler life, there is something wholly simple and child-like. He has realised that sorrow is the keystone of life, and that this long period of confinement has been the only ponderable thing in his life since the early days of his literary effort.

OSCAR WILDE :

❧ ❧ ❧ The splendid glamour of success was an interlude. "Under suffering what one before felt dimly, through instinct, is intellectually and emotionally realised with perfect clearness of vision and absolute intensity of apprehension."

☪ ☪ ☪ The soul does not realise itself until it also realises its dependence upon others. There is no good book through which there has not run the hopes and the fears of the whole world. "Whatever happens to oneself happens to another."

♣ ♣ ♣ This is at once the pathos of life and its richness,—for the joy of perfect happiness, untouched by the sorrow of the world, is a vain and empty thing. When the soul realises that it reflects in itself the manifold thoughts of the entire world, the whole of nature in all its multitudinous aspects,—the ignorance of the savage, the tranquility of the recluse, the æsthetic eagerness of the artist, the unvoiced terrors of the weak—then, and then alone, does the soul know the body, and the body recognise the soul.

❧ ❧ ❧ That Christ should have become to Wilde the noblest of all possible types is not remarkable. Although he was wont to avow his contempt of religion, he had an instinctive and deep reverence for nobility of character, and the daily intercourse in prison with the Nazarene

A MEMOIR.

brought out a flood of tenderness in his character, hitherto sleeping. "The fact that God loves man shows us that in the divine order of ideal things it is written that eternal love is to be given to what is eternally unworthy. Or if that phrase seems to be a bitter one to bear, let us say that every one is worthy of love, except he who thinks that he is."

☪ ☪ ☪ Love and let love. In these studies of the life of Christ he is tremendously in earnest. He had developed a spiritual clairvoyance. He saw in the Christ-life a code of repression under suffering such as he grew to believe would reconcile the monstrous injustice of society towards him with his own sense of guilt and adequate punishment. And apart from the psychological interest of these revelations one finds many of the old flashes of epigram and wit,—each sentence is complete and neatly turned.

"Art is a symbol because man is a symbol."

"The artistic life is simply self-development."

"It is in the brain that everything takes place."

♣ ♣ ♣ One closes the volume with a conviction that he had evolved—that the cynicism of his prosperous days had been eliminated, and that out of his downfall had grown the real Wilde: the radiant yet withal pitiful man of letters. I cannot help but recall one of his exclamations to Israel Zangwill, "And so with breaches

OSCAR WILDE :

of morals. The world at large should condemn ; but the private friends, who know the circumstances in every petty involution, who know the temptations and the extenuating factors, should form, as it were, a court of appeal. If they elect to stand by the offender, then the world at large should re-consider its verdict."

❧ ❧ ❧ In view of the confession contained in "De Profundis" it is impossible to acquit Wilde of all blame. He himself says :—

❧ ❧ ❧ "People thought it dreadful of me to have entertained at dinner the evil things of life, and to have found pleasure in their company. But then from the point of view through which I, as an artist in life, approach them, they were delightfully suggestive and stimulating. The danger was half the excitement. . . . A great friend of mine—a friend of ten years' standing—came to see me some time ago, and told me that he did not believe a single word of what was said against me, and wished me to know that he considered me quite innocent, and the victim of a hideous plot. I burst into tears at what he said, and told him that while there was much amongst the definite charges that was quite untrue, and transferred to me by revolting malice, still that my life had been full of perverse pleasures."

A MEMOIR.

♣ ♣ ♣ This same friend writes to me from Vernon, France: "Oscar's downfall came, so far as its causes went, as a shock to me. The tragedy of it was that a man's sexual habits really concern none but himself, and it was terrible that such a life should be ruined by English hypocrisy, ignorance and Calvinism. I am and have always been profoundly contemptuous of others' opinions."

🌸 🌸 🌸 Art like religion is absolute. There is an ultimatum beyond which one may not aspire. Wilde's last book will be treasured by the few,—admired by the many. There is a sense in which his fame is greater than the greatest. He will always stand as the symbol of self-sufficiency.

"Lo! thus, by day my limbs, by night my mind,
For thee, and for myself, no quiet find."

🌀 🌀 🌀 I am content to let his fame rest upon a passage as perfect as the following:—

♣ ♣ ♣ "For just as the body absorbs things of all kinds, things common and unclean no less than those that the priest or a vision has cleansed, and converts them into swiftness or strength, into the play of beautiful muscles and the moulding of fair flesh, into the curves and colours of the hair, the lips, the eyes; so that soul in its turn has its nutritive functions also,

OSCAR WILDE: A MEMOIR.

and can transform into noble moods of thought and passions of high import what in itself is base, cruel and degrading ; nay, more, may find in these its most august modes of assertion, and can often reveal itself most perfectly through what was intended to desecrate or destroy."

"Mult ad apris ki ben conmiist ahan."
—*Chanson de Roland.*

VI.

❧ ❧ ❧ Even in declaring himself a decadent Oscar Wilde was a man to be loved. As "Heart's Brother" he was known to the favoured few who were admitted into the inner circle of his life. The most precious poet is not he who brings the laughter bubbling to our lips ; nor is it he who moves us to tears by his pathos. It is he who makes his sorrow, his pain, his passionate longings most beautiful and most musical to our ears. It is he into whose rhymes has crept that incommunicable something called "self ;" that element of æsthetic delight in one's own attributes which would render a dunghill full of sweet odours. What Keats calls the "sensuous life of verse" must rule the fancy of every writer of poetry. Edgar Allan Poe was occasionally drunk. Oscar Wilde was occasionally a moral debauchee ; but what years of sober and restrained labour went to make "Tales of Romance and Fantasy," on the one hand, and the keen epigram of

My Dear Jack.

You are a good lad, Thomas
Young — here it is —

Treads lightly, she is here —
^{under the snow} Speak gently, she can hear
The daisies grow.

All her bright golden hair
Fallen to dust —

She that was young and fair

Oh! I cannot — I cannot.

Come and see me write it

Always : your.

ccc

It is not infrequently that an author mis-quotes his own works. The correct words of the Requiescat are on page 40. This is a most characteristic letter—petulant, egotistical, friendly.

OSCAR WILDE: A MEMOIR.

"Intentions" on the other! Which is the true Oscar Wilde—the moral leper, the gibe of the man in the street,—or the strenuous artist, the man who cried,—

"Methinks no flower would ever bud in Spring,
But for the lover's lips that kiss, the poet's lips that sing?"

The morals of the poet are always misrepresented, misunderstood. The most ascetic of our singers lay themselves open to condemnation if we read their lives too critically. The light that beats around every action of the man of note, the frank confession beaming from the thoughts of the poet, reveal the soul itself. I can vouch that the average morality of Oscar Wilde was superior to that of many of his contemporaries. For the poet's imagination must be fervid, and the æsthetic value of his work depends less upon the character of the man, than upon the genius of the artist. Oscar Wilde is entitled to a niche in the world of letters, and I hope sincerely that the obloquy which has so long obscured his memory will ere long be lifted. In claiming his right to immortality I do not hesitate. The man who could write this *Requiescat* was not wholly bad:—

☞ ☞ ☞ "Tread lightly, she is near,
Under the snow;
Speak gently, she can hear
The daisies grow.

OSCAR WILDE : A MEMOIR.

♣ ♣ ♣ All her bright golden hair
Tarnished with rust ;
She that was young and fair
Fallen to dust.

🌸 🌸 🌸 Lily-like, white as snow,
She hardly knew
She was a woman, so
Sweetly she grew.

☪ ☪ ☪ Coffin-board, heavy stone
Lie on her breast ;
I vex my heart alone,
She is at rest.

♣ ♣ ♣ Peace, peace, she cannot hear
Lyre or sonnet ;
All my life's buried here,—
Heap earth upon it."

🌸 🌸 🌸 That God may rest his soul in peace, and give
him that true sense of love and fellowship which he so
madly sought, and so wrongly conceived in this sad
world, is my heart-felt prayer.

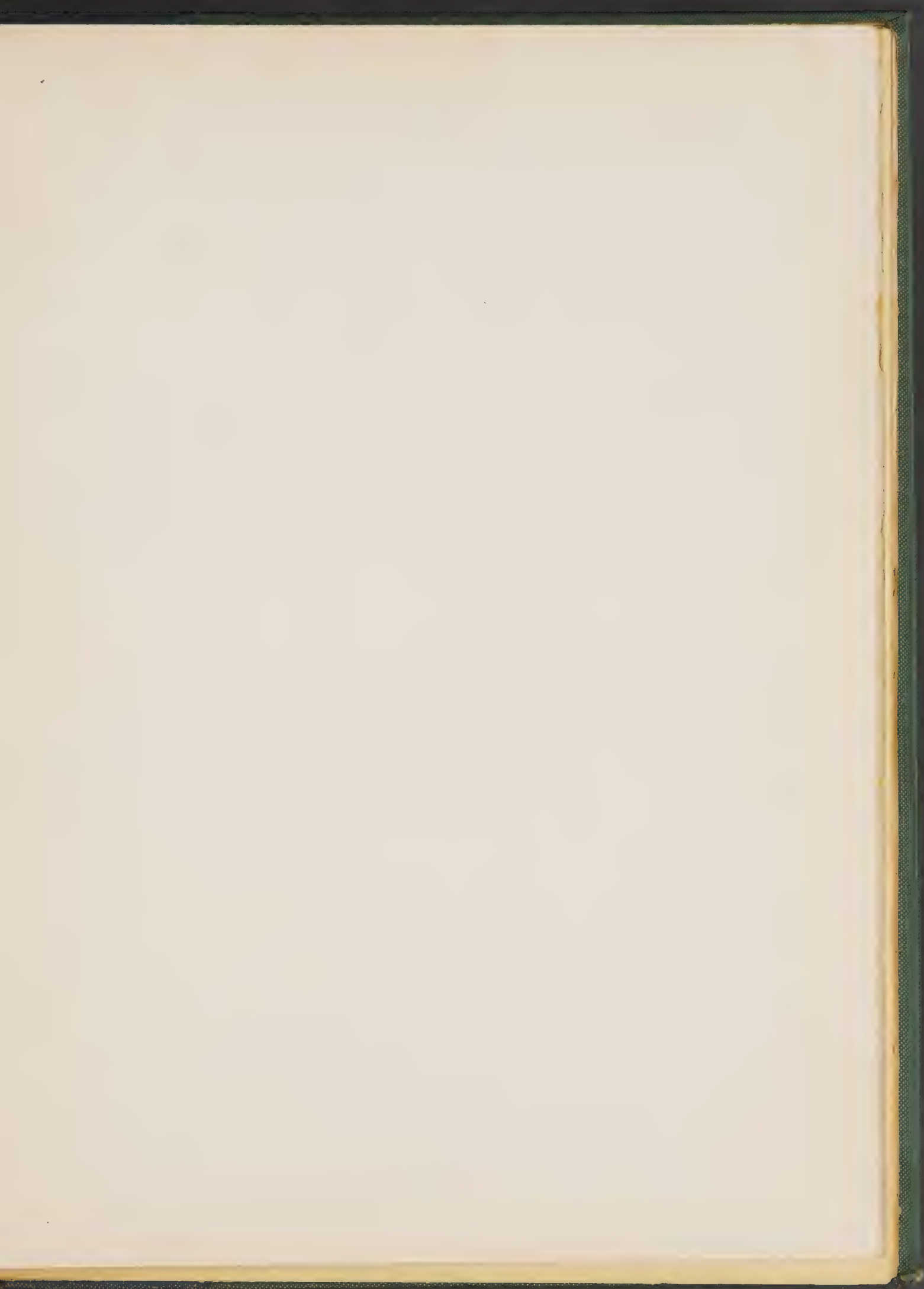
J. M. STUART-YOUNG.

Conakry, West Africa,
May 1st, 1905.

*To drift with every passion, till the soul
Is a stringed lute on which all winds can play—
Is it for this that I have given away
Mine ancient wisdom and austere control?
Methinks my life is a twice-written scroll
Scrawled over in some boyish holiday
With idle songs for pipe and virelay
Which do but marr the secret of the whole.
Surely there was a time I might have trod
The sunlit heights, and from life's dissonance
Struck one clear chord to reach the ears of God!
Is that time dead? Lo! with a little rod
I did but touch the honey of romance,
And must I lose a soul's inheritance?*

OSRAC, THE
SELF-
SUFFICIENT.

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"OSRAC" (Oscar Wilde as a youth).

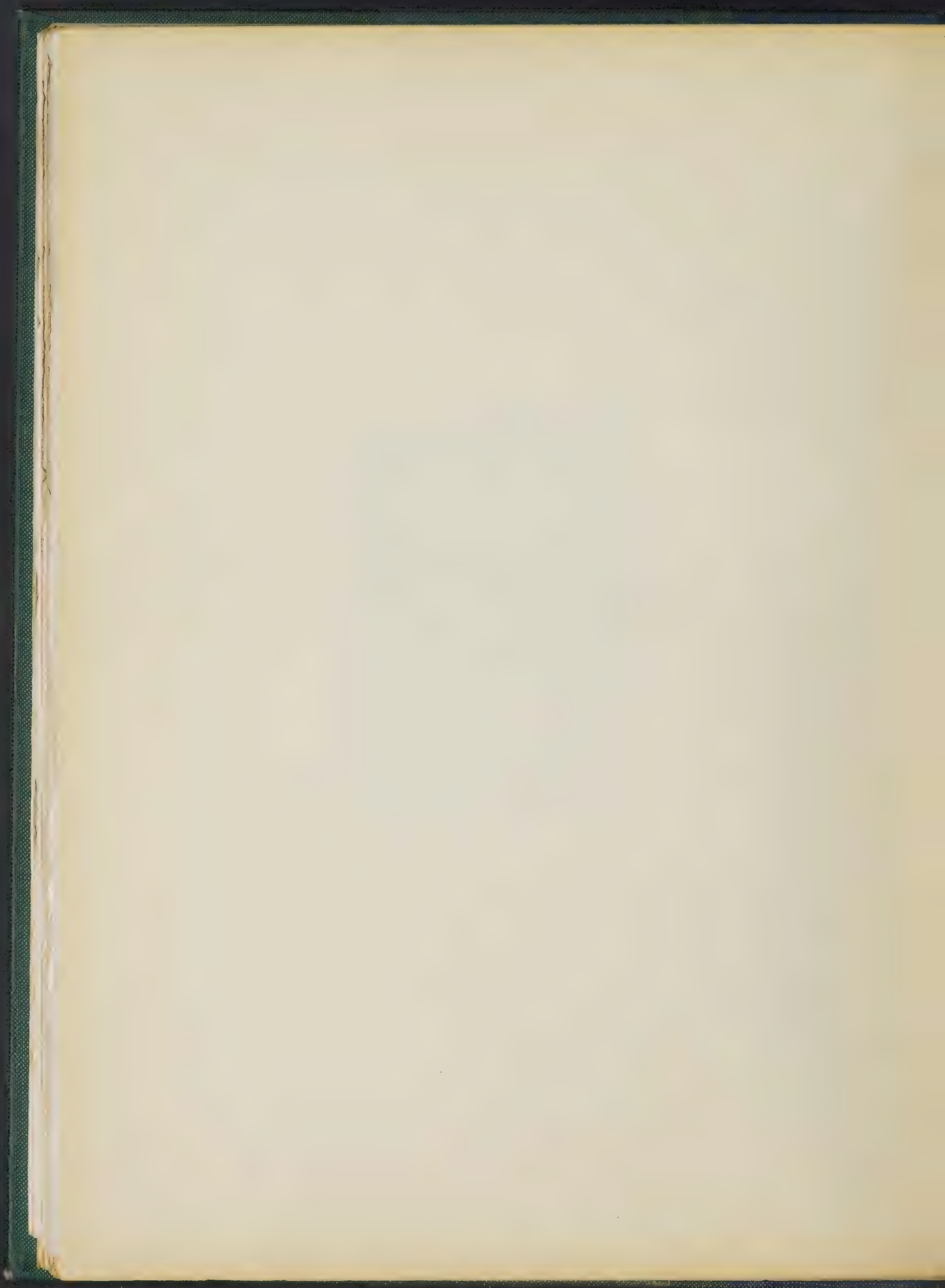
OSRAC, THE SELF-SUFFICIENT.

I.

☞ ☞ ☞ It is full summer, and the joy of June
Upon the hedges is incarnadine ;
The quiet upland ripens all too soon
For the brown reapers, while the lowing kine
Exalt their nostrils to the glowing bowl.
The pale narcissi linger doubtfully,—
Frail vernal violets long have paid the toll
Of their brief happiness. The honey-bee
Holds holiday, the while the birds keep gleeful company.

II.

♣ ♣ ♣ Frolicsome Eros ! linger yet a-while,
A few there are who chant thy mysteries :
Some yet remain who, at thy luring smile,
Have ventured near, and are thy votaries ;
For thee dead Osrac yielded up his youth,



OSRAC, THE SELF-SUFFICIENT.

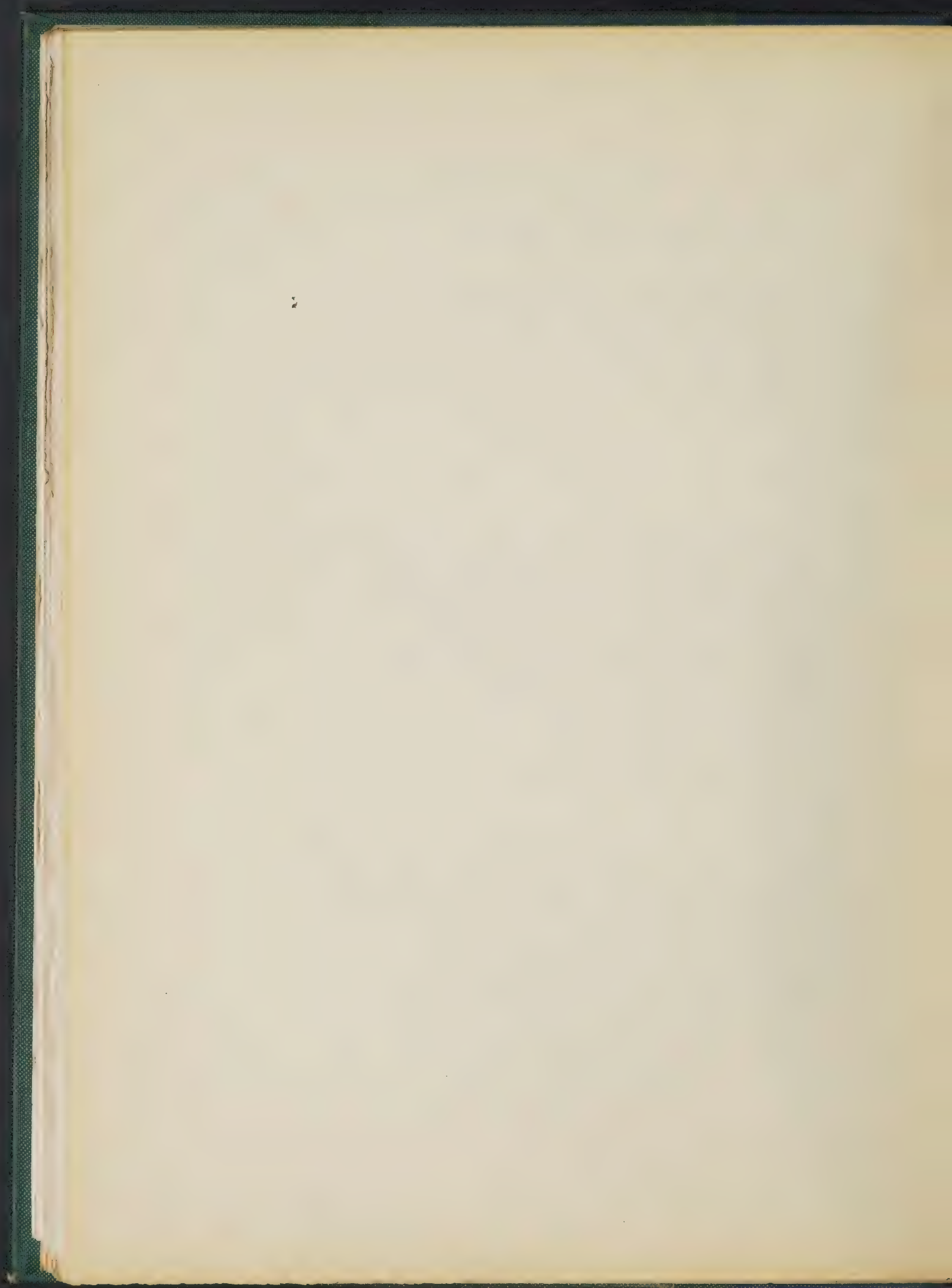
And consecrated all that soul holds best,
To charm thee to a semblance of the Truth ;
Ay, at thy shrine he found a goodlier feast
Than ever yet was vouchsafed by the hands of bloody
priest.

III.

☞ ☞ ☞ Ah, tarry ! Here the boy who loved thee well
Made glad the day, and fresh the prolix night,
With subtle songs,—does not the night-jar tell
The name of Osrac to the coming light ?
He touch'd his kindest lyre beneath the stars,
In silvern tune made rueful threnody :
His voice was sweet, withal he knew the bars
Of thund'rous echo on a stormy sea,
Or playful ripple of lark at morn in gentlest revelry.

IV.

☞ ☞ ☞ We know his songs : the vigorous Charmides,
Enamour'd of an image, and bereft
Of healthy reason, bent on fervent knees
Before the shrine of Grecian goddess ; left
All night to make vex'd venery of her charms.



OSRAC, THE SELF-SUFFICIENT.

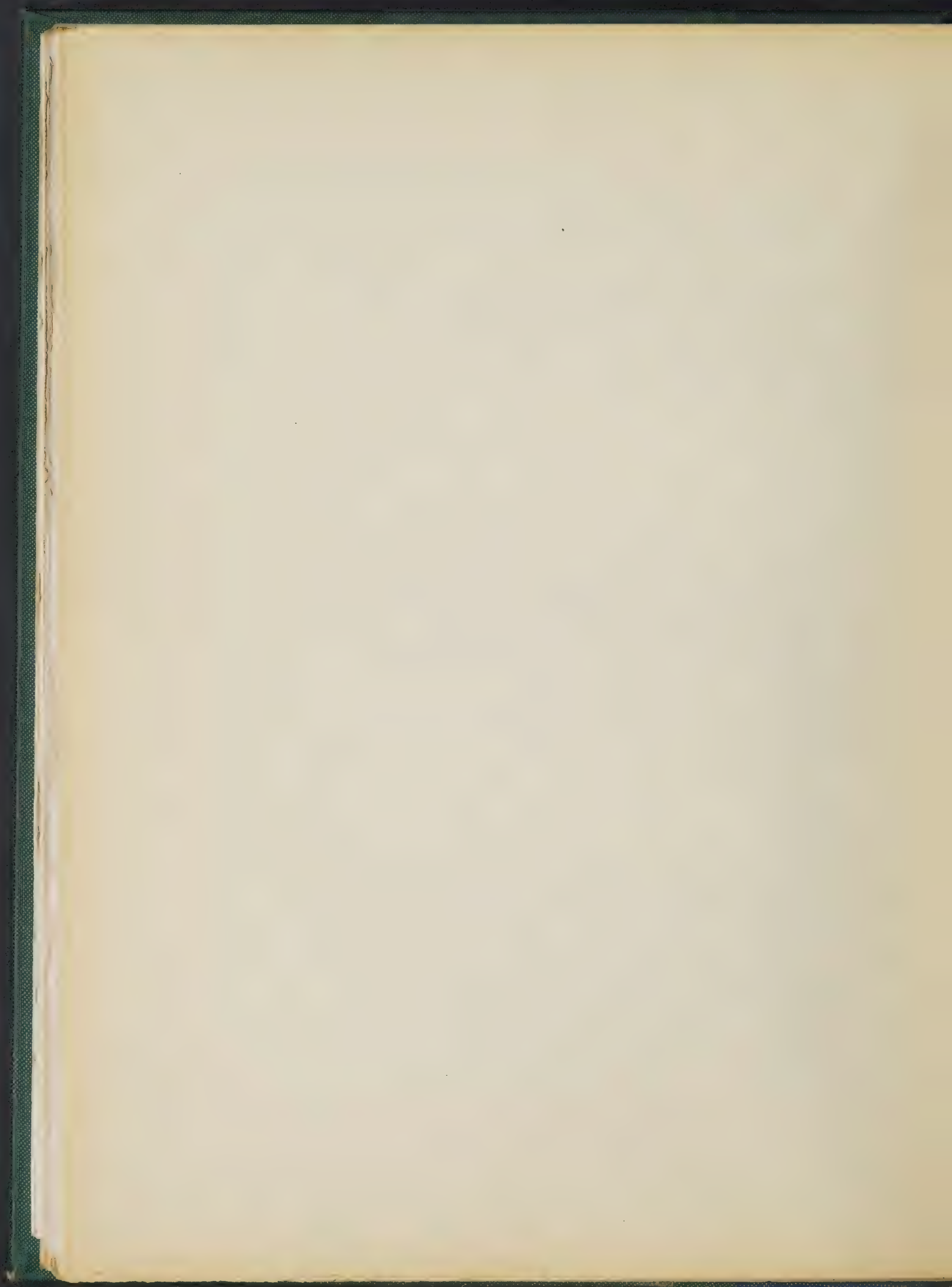
(What trembling wonder holds us at this tryst !)
To languish in her cool embracing arms,
And play with moon-lit bosom, while he kiss'd
Her unresponsive lips with burning heart, nor cloyment
wist.

V.

♣ ♣ ♣ On listless adolescent days in Spring,
Our souls provoked by blue of violet,
Have we not lain a-near the skylark's wing
And read until our flashing eyes were wet ?
How oft in cool and bosky nook have we,
While noisy boys and cricket eights have cried,
Listen'd resistless to his melody,
And deem'd in mock love's surfeit we had died,
As through our veins the rush and throb of volupty has
hied.

VI.

❧ ❧ ❧ Trite modern wit ! Familiar poets dun !
Ye run to Ignorance, and the common lot
Of man is sordid. Analyse the sun,
And lecture on the moon,—we care nor wot
Naught of your scales. Let mundane atoms run



OSRAC, THE SELF-SUFFICIENT.

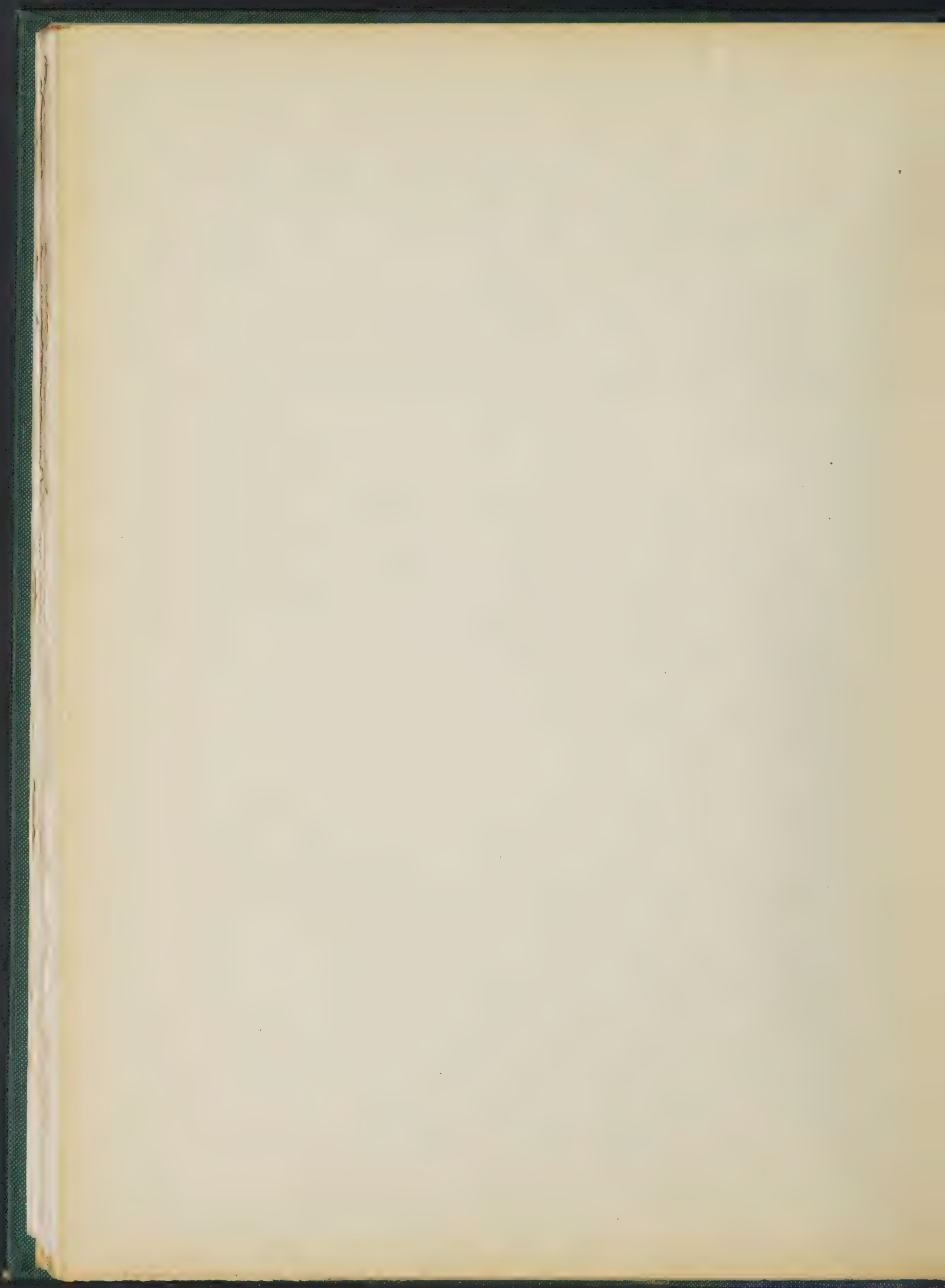
Amock upon the earth till life be sped :
When mind is map'd and Fancy's day is done
We still shall see a Naiad's shining head,
And magnify the rainbow when your soulless joys are fled.

VII.

☞ ☞ ☞ What profits us to let the heart be tamed
From Love's unreasoning throe? Inerrable age
Creeps on like pallid hag with members maim'd.
Science, nor fact, nor reason can assuage
The pulsing heart's wild cry. Let be, let be,
Such songs as Osrac's clear the atmosphere :
The poet's winged thoughts are progeny
Of God-like amours. O, we do not fear
The grave's cold hand while song and wine and love are
ever near.

VIII.

♣ ♣ ♣ Self was his theme. Ah ! paler Virtue shrinks
From out our sight awhile, and all the fields
Grow red with lambent sin, while Nature drinks
Deep nectar'd draughts in ecstasy, and yields
Her rarest odours. Oft in sunnier years,



OSRAC, THE SELF-SUFFICIENT.

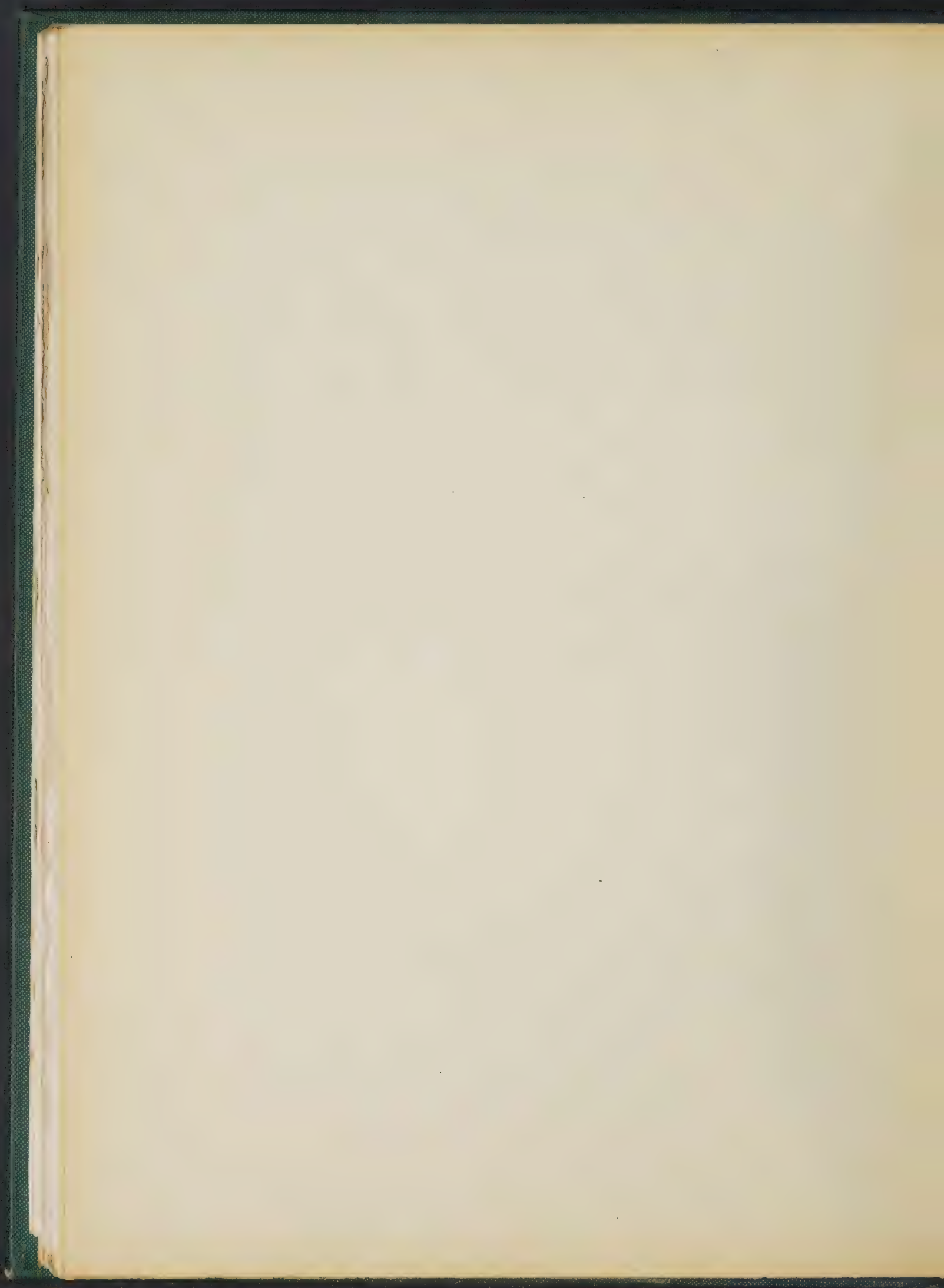
Reading of favour'd glance by lover won,
My soul has yearn'd for more than human tears
To weep for all that man to thee has done,
Osrac, heart's brother, poet, friend of years long gone !

IX.

❧ ❧ ❧ What secret joy inspired him first to sing
In delicate woods where thyme and roses bloom ?—
Young Osrac, bending o'er a clear cool spring,
Saw mirror'd in't himself, and had no room
For other love. There are dull hearts that break
Because of one frail woman's fleeting grace :
And musing oft the slumb'rous thoughts awake
In perfume of the moment, manner, place,—
But steadfast, honest and more faithful is thine own true
face.

X.

❧ ❧ ❧ There was a time when maidenhood's fair gleam
On boyhood vision all his thought beguiled,—
Or ere, when languishing by some hidden stream
He woo'd himself, and at the fancy smiled.
Nor less it pleased him in sequester'd bowers



OSRAC, THE SELF-SUFFICIENT.

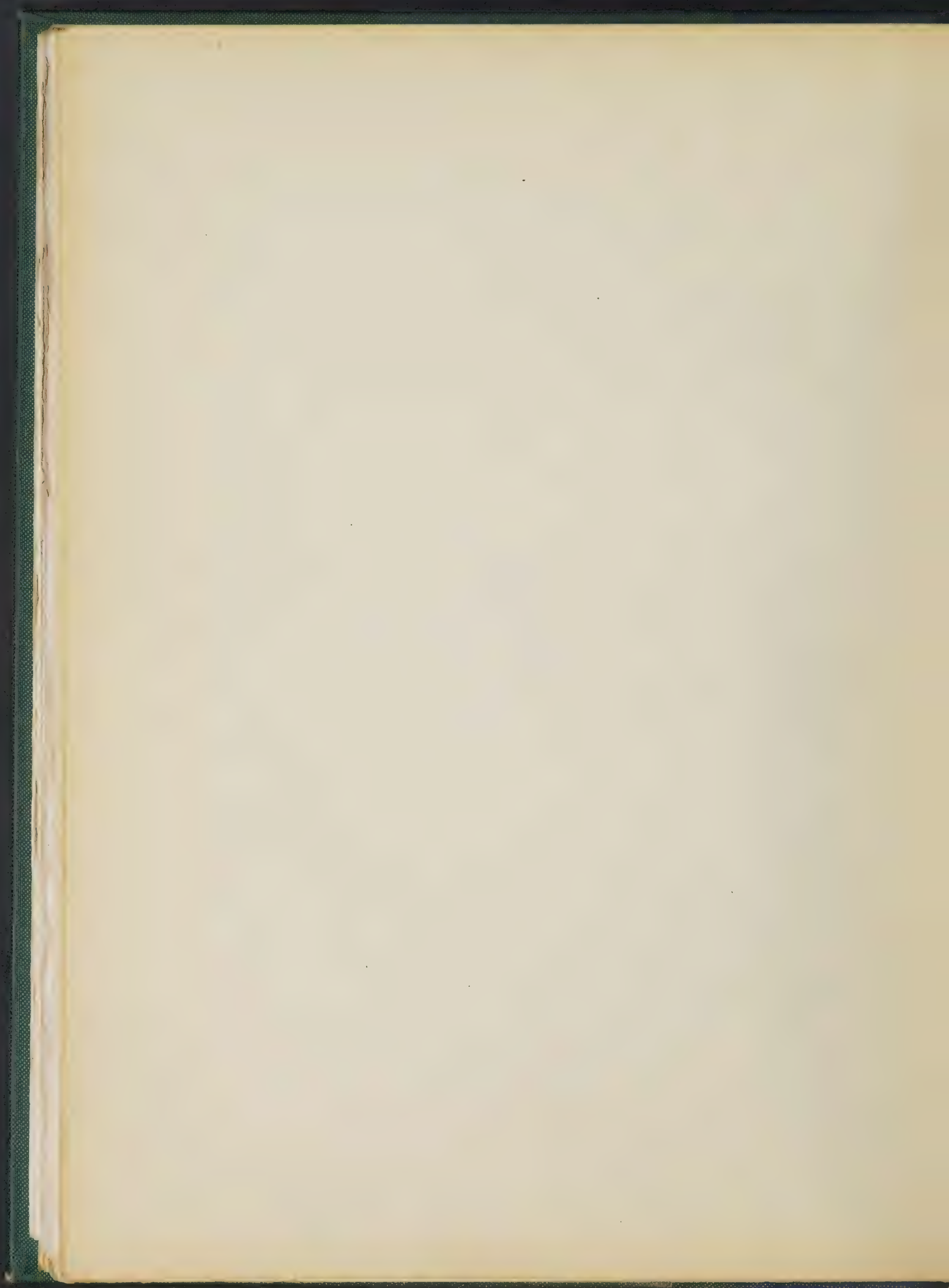
To loiter all the day in gleeful pride,
(Life knew no burden then of hurrying hours)—
Self would suffice. He toss'd his curls aside,
And clap'd his hands all childishly, and in his glamour
cried.

XI.

♣ ♣ ♣ Somnambulated by the pine's low voice
He saw three skylarks, speeding from the blue
With expectative throb of tested choice :
For as he mark'd their sun-kiss'd wings he knew
That they had lower'd to join in conflict there.
One minute's passionate noisy strife above—
A few torn plumes afloat on ambient air—
A flash of feathers through the greeny grove—
But two were link'd together by the wiser laws of love !

XII.

🌸 🌸 🌸 The days in tuneful measure pass'd away,
Butterfly or bird alike was welcome guest ;
Each night came harbinger of brighter day,
He knew naught of the pangs that rend the breast
Of sterner years. Enjoyment seal'd with bliss



OSRAC, THE SELF-SUFFICIENT.

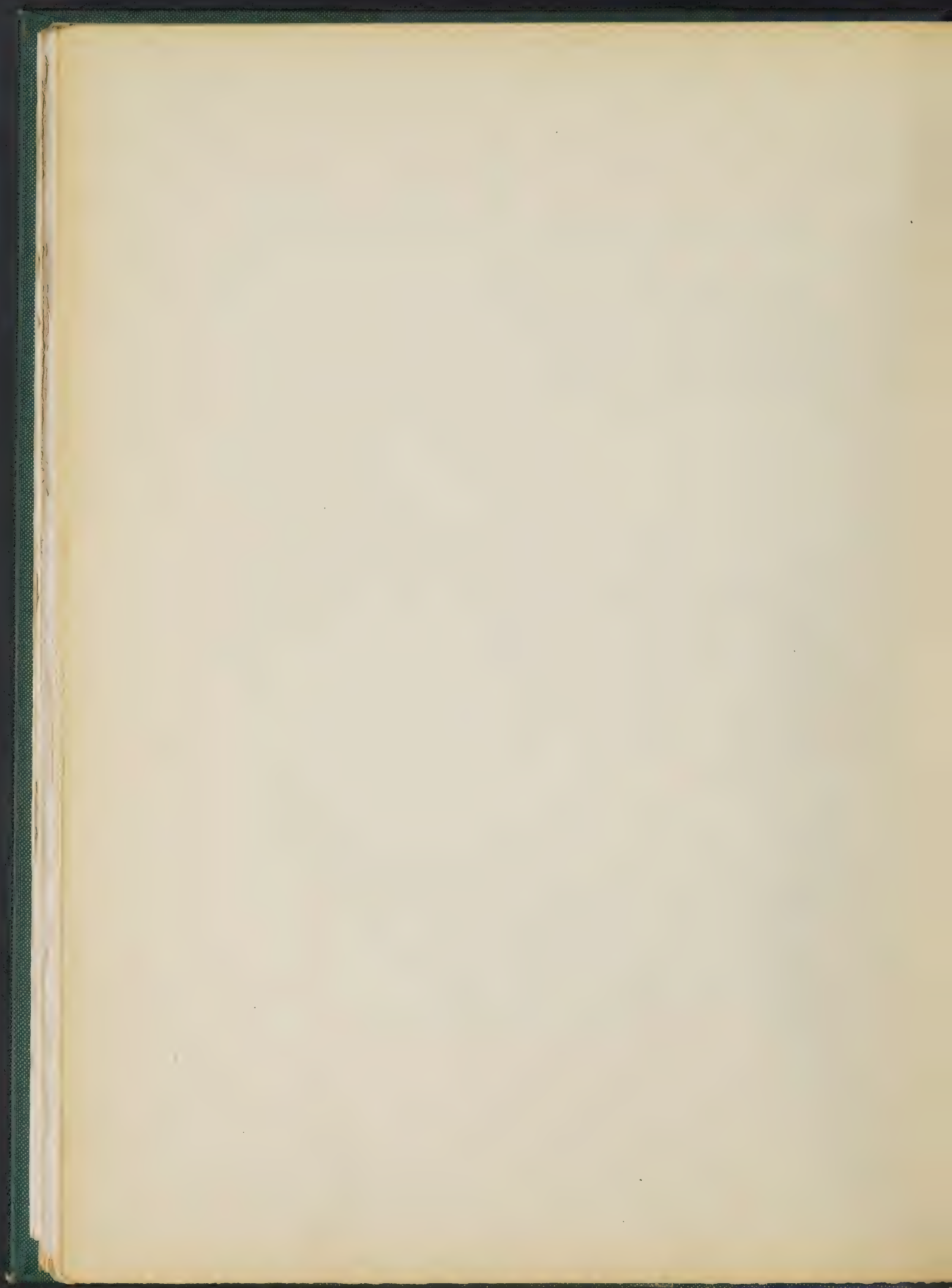
His every hour, nor could he dream of hate.
He hail'd Dame Nature with the lover's kiss,
For she proclaim'd his life inviolate,
And thus he grew from boyism to manhood's young
estate.

XIII.

☪ ☪ ☪ As dawn, a-tiptoe, crept from out the night
Fair nymphs and satyrs danced upon the sward
Or 'neath the trees that shimmer'd in the light ;
And ere time one would bend her face toward
The drowsy poet and their lips would meet.
Bereaving his white limbs young Pan would roam
On the lake's marge, and through the patient reeds
Make liquid piping, youth unshent by foam,
And in sweet sound seduce him to that fairy water-
home.

XIV.

♣ ♣ ♣ And on a day of artless innocence
He built an altar to his god, and wove
A gown of flowers and fragile ferns, and thence
He daily turned his steps. The holy grove
In his uncertain brain was Shrine of Love ;



OSRAC, THE SELF-SUFFICIENT.

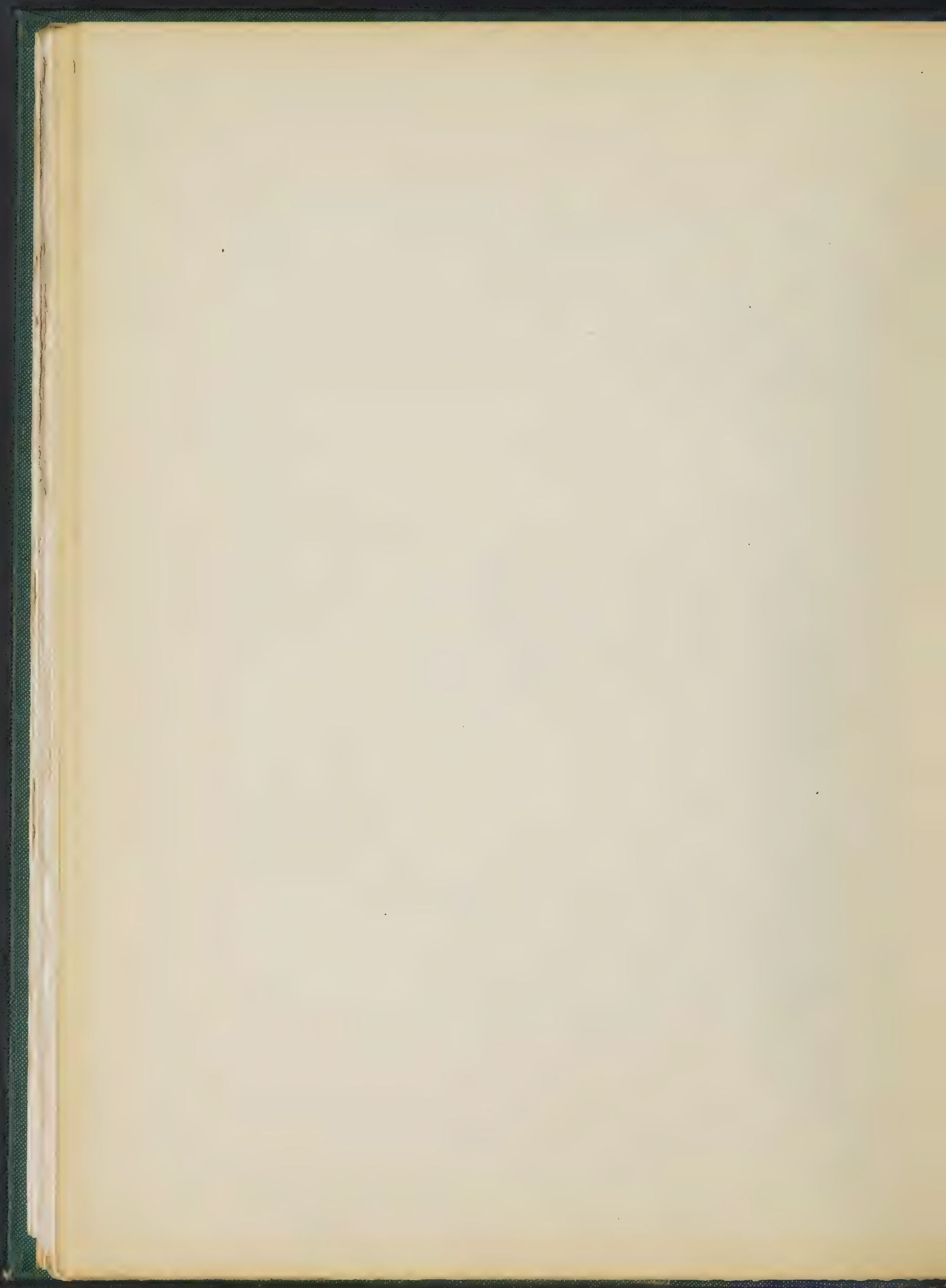
He dream'd away his days in whisp'ring praise
To whims and fancies and Art's treasure trove,—
The buzz of insects and the throstles' lays
Were sweet as honey. Frolicsome are Spring-time's
early days.

XV.

❧ ❧ ❧ And when the hills had don'd their purple cloak,
And sun had lustily encouch'd the day,
He twined his hair with flowers. The nightjar woke
To sing his song with pulse and virelay.
His limbs he cleans'd, and dress'd his bed with white,
Ere he laid amorous down. Scarce dared he breathe
The while he mused and scan'd the gleaming night,
Until he slept entrancingly. His wreath
Exulting trembled in the wind which summer-nights
bequeath.

XVI.

❧ ❧ ❧ And then with parted lips he lay, and felt
Within himself the surging of desire.
Alack-a-day! Ye, who have humbly knelt
Before a woman yearn'd, know not the fire
That made his hands and eyes so desperate



OSRAC, THE SELF-SUFFICIENT.

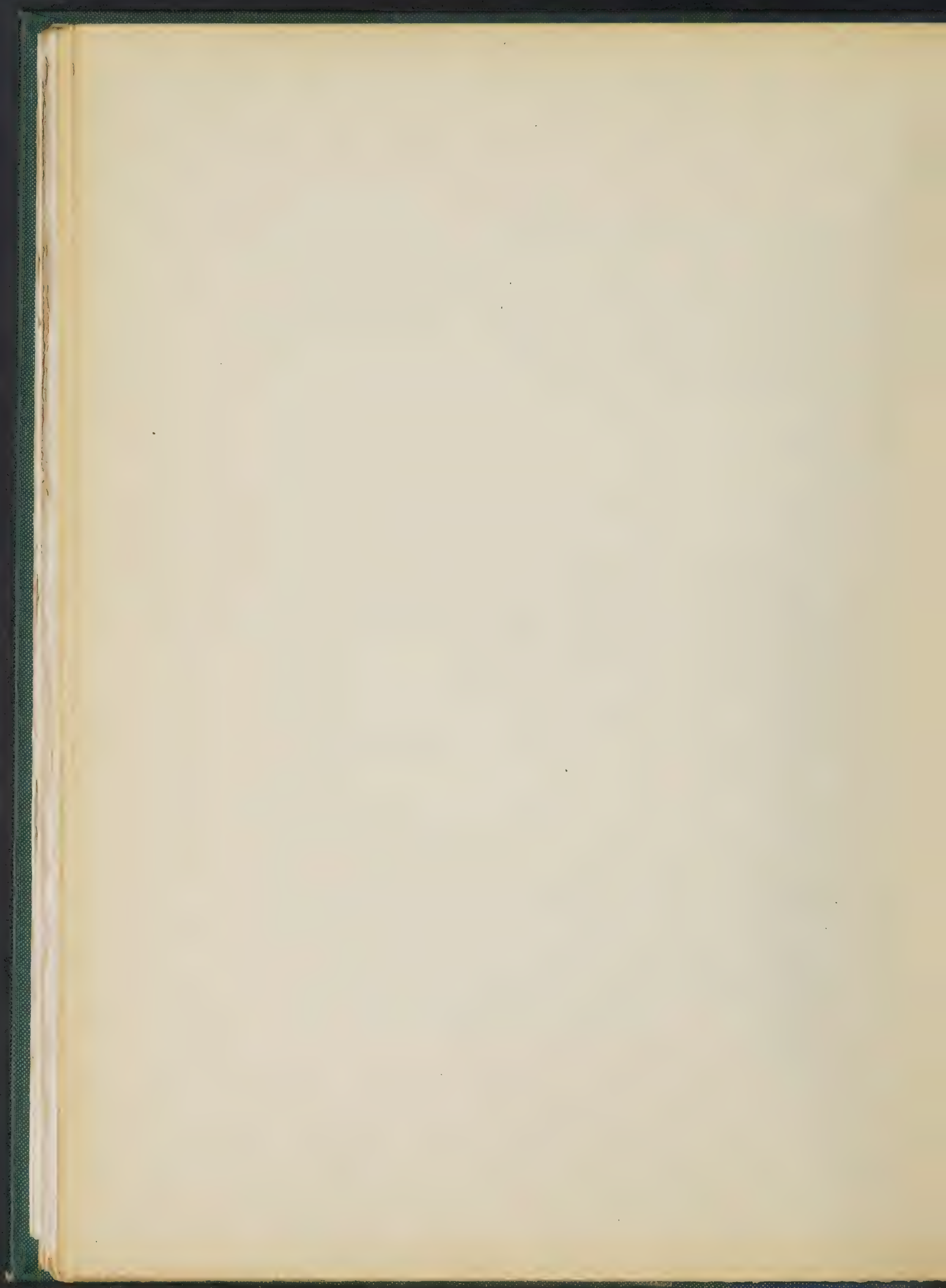
To dally with fair limbs of ivory.
Ye, who have never sin'd to violate
Your over-precious flesh, read restfully,—
The while his greedy eyes fed on he dealt in sorcery.

XVII.

♣ ♣ ♣ For as the pristine flood of passional zeal
Gush'd like a mountain torrent from its source,
He sought from mental irritant to steal
The glamour of love's relish. O'er the course
Of his fair youngness stole the first red wound.
But rare unquity was his, and long
He revered to the god of self, and croon'd
In song low-noted, unaware of wrong,
Nor conscious that each hour of joy would carry heavier
thong.

XVIII.

🌿 🌿 🌿 And through the night he murmur'd to himself
Of mystic joys, and kept the lonely tryst ;
He wanly smiled at Eros, flitting elf,
And dreamed of things unravish'd and unkiss'd.
His nerves and brain were thrill'd with sobbing pain,



OSRAC, THE SELF-SUFFICIENT.

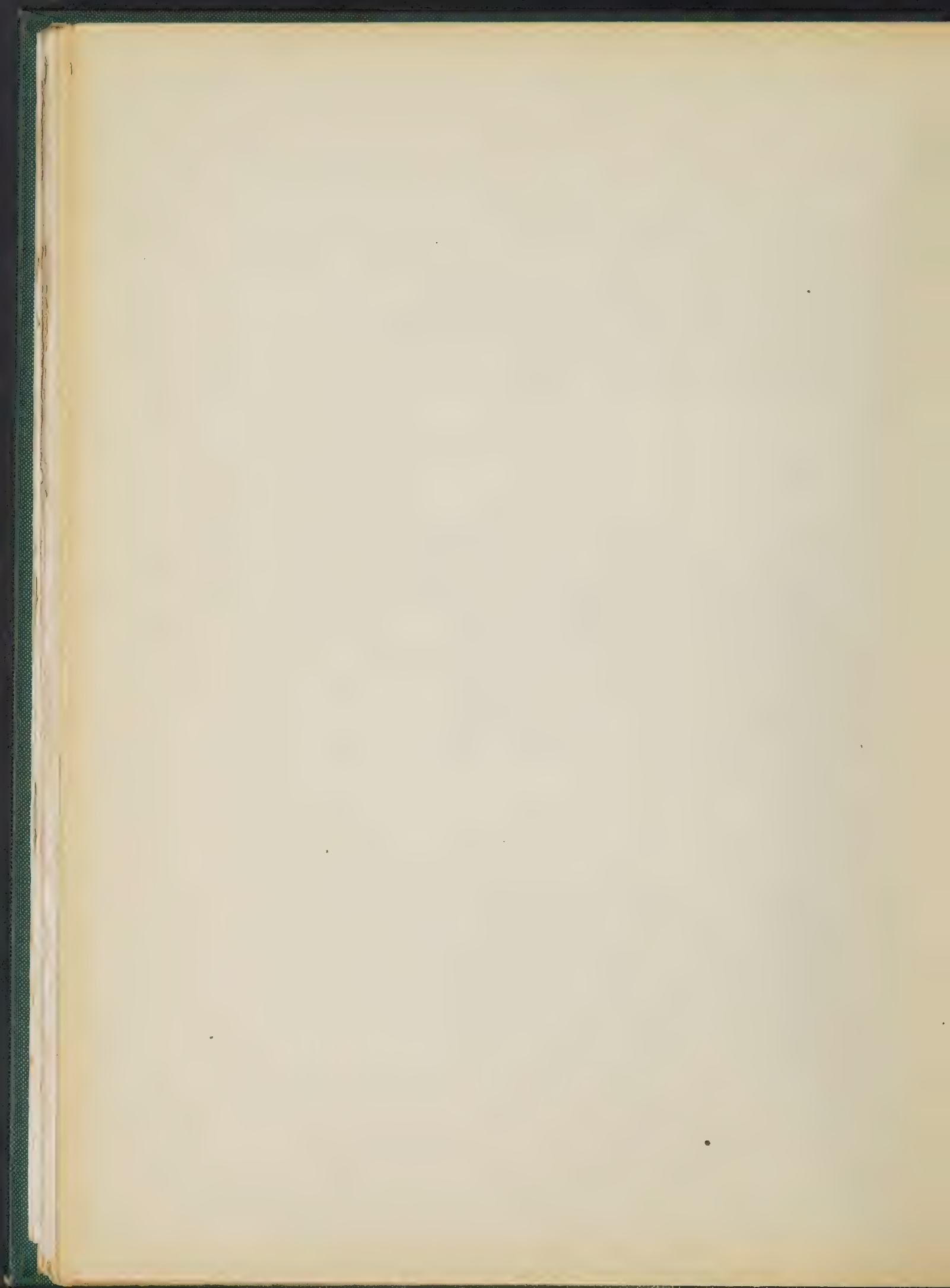
He breath'd an anguish keener than true sin,
And stretch'd his limbs and kiss'd and kiss'd again,
Till kissing seemed the fruit of love within,
And crush'd his breasts in fondest tyranny, to feel and
win

XIX.

☪ ☪ ☪ From out his treasures all that life could yield,
And lay till morn, thirsting with lover's drouth,
And longing for the laggard drink. The field
Invited him to play ; he trick'd his mouth
With hot and trembling fingers, half-afraid ;
Then wash'd, and all the day sang sweetest song.
But when the dusk had fallen,—renegade—
Return'd he to his couch, forgot the throng,
And twined his splendid manhood in delusion the night
long.

XX.

♣ ♣ ♣ Woman is mutable and answerable to change,
But Osrac pleased in each nerve and thought ;
His love was like consuming fire, so strange
As wondrous riddle-book with intent fraught :
Earth were a desert, else-wise, this removed,



OSRAC, THE SELF-SUFFICIENT.

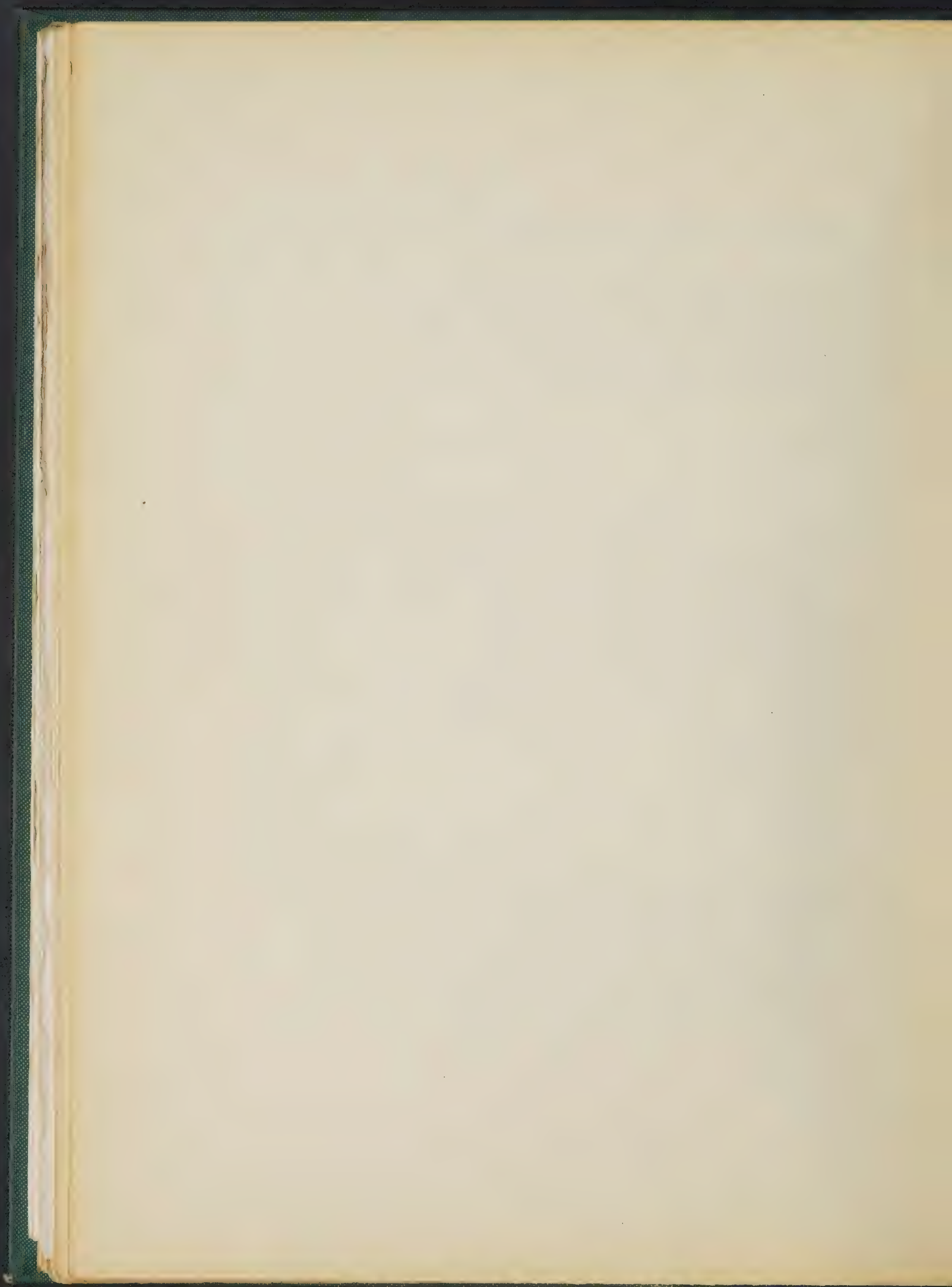
He quenched his thirst at ever-willing fount,
And wisely whisper'd "None can tell I loved."
As daily yet his jubilance did mount,
He held the docile sex exuberant, of no account.

XXI.

❧ ❧ ❧ One sunny morn a girl came swinging by,
A challenge on each lip of pouting red,
She glanced at him with many a wreathed sigh,
And halting words of admiration said :
And as she near'd he felt his pulses stir
In sudden passion, and he leapt to greet
Her outstretched hands. In poppied look at her
He mark'd the curves of throat and bosom,—meet
Home for fatigue. This was no dream, no poor elusive
cheat.

XXII.

❧ ❧ ❧ A lovely girl she was, with face up-turned,
And heavy hair, dim, braided at the ears ;
Dark drowsy lids droop'd over eyes that burned,
And seem'd to swim in lakes of parlous tears ;
Her cheeks were rounded, virginal of pain,



OSRAC, THE SELF-SUFFICIENT.

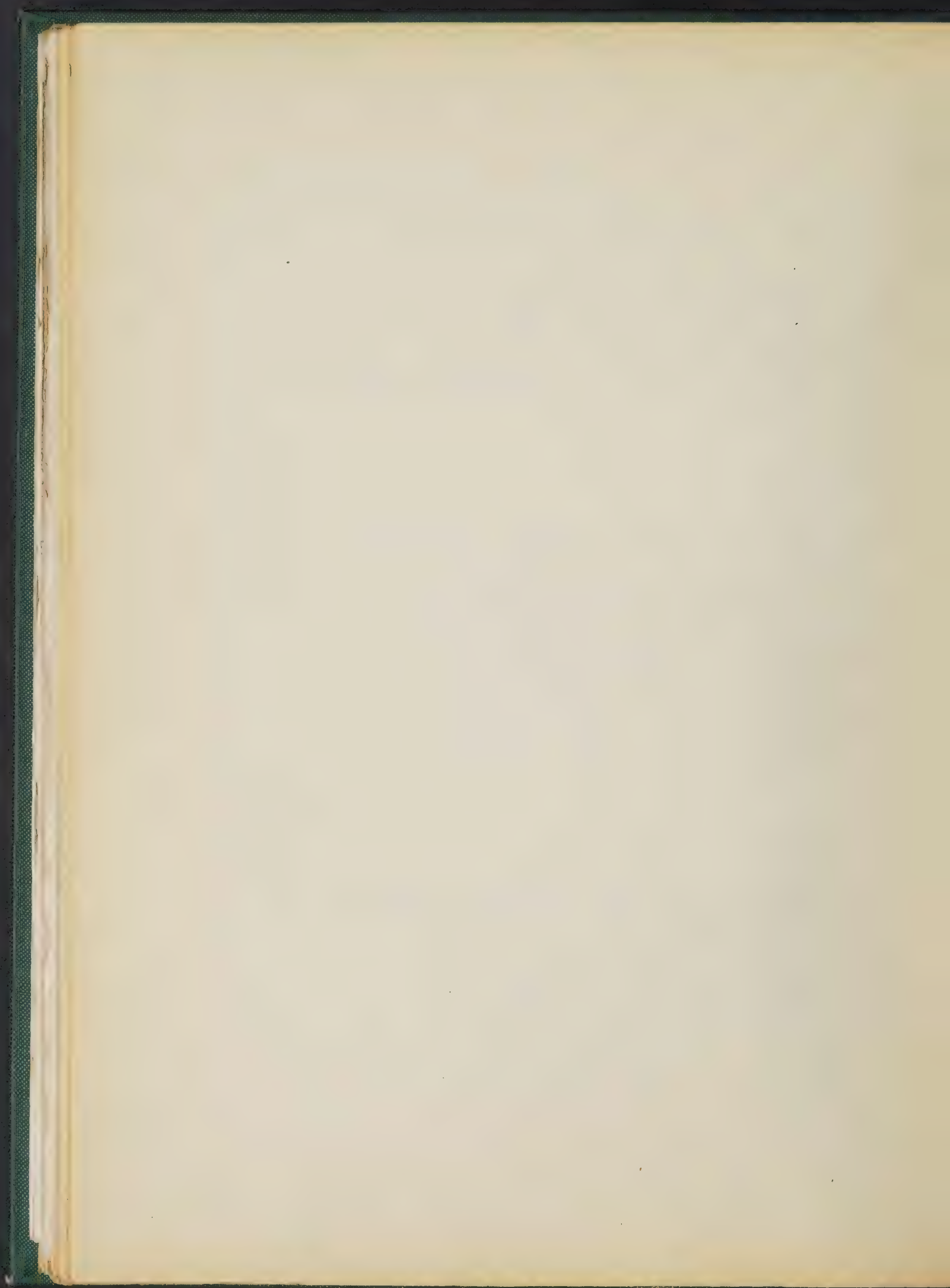
Red lips were drawn a-down with hope of joy,
And in her throat shone one clean purple vein ;
She gazed with zealous eyes upon the boy,
And then look'd down with shrinking glance, both perilous
and coy.

XXIII.

♣ ♣ ♣ She pleaded soft, and said, " It was for thee
I kept my robe unspotted. I have come
That thou should'st rob me of my chastity,
For I have yearn'd to share thy secret home.
O, I have dream'd for many weary moons
That thy sweet manliness alone can burst,
In multitudinous bars of raptured tunes,
My maidenhood. I came to thee at first,
When thou wert kneeling at thy shrine of lonely lust
accurs'd :—

XXIV.

🌿 🌿 🌿 " O, come away, my sweet. In exquisite trill
Where through the trees the silent stars appear,
I'll sing to thee ; and ere the air be still,
The dearest rites of woman-love shall near,
And in the cool of night you shall be mine :



OSRAC, THE SELF-SUFFICIENT.

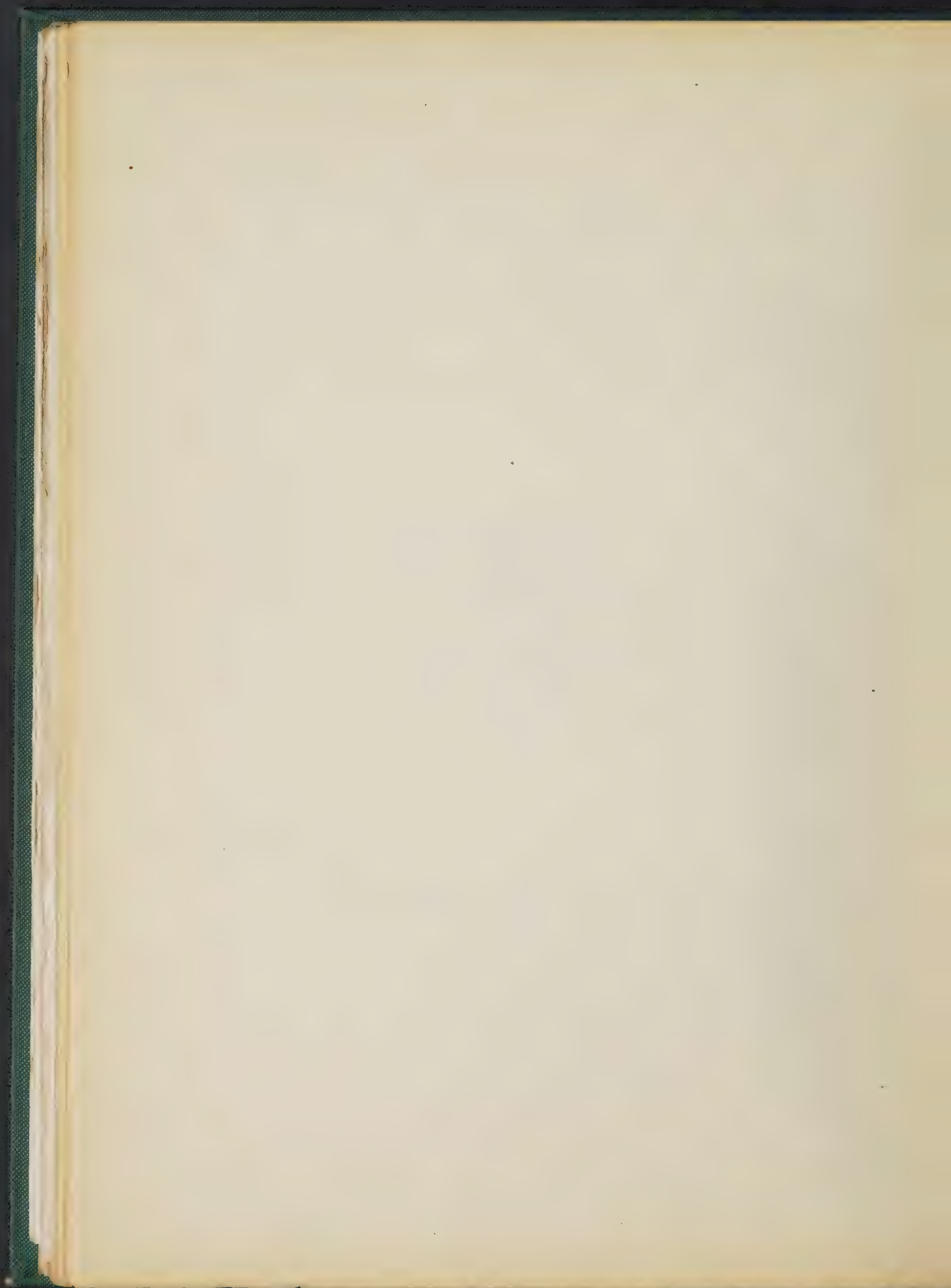
For lovers we will be. My paramour,
Look in mine eyes and see desire divine.
Strip off this tedious maiden vestiture,—
Come let us join in hidden surfeits while the stars endure.”

XXV.

☪ ☪ ☪ Revulsion seized him, and he fought within
'Gainst fell desire, and curs'd the white-faced girl.
He drove her from him,—shrank away from sin,
So fair as this ; nor did he cease to hurl
His valedictions after her ; then fell
Upon his face, and kiss'd his flowers, and knelt
Before his shrine. His soul had been in hell,
The while he listen'd to her voice and dealt
In thought of lawful love, and all her wondrous witcheries
felt.

XXVI.

♣ ♣ ♣ Self drew him ever. Ah ! the precious vice
Upon each sense in fascination grew :
He would not yield one thought of after-price
That must be paid to outraged nature, Jew,
Who extorts from his debtors fullest room



OSRAC, THE SELF-SUFFICIENT.

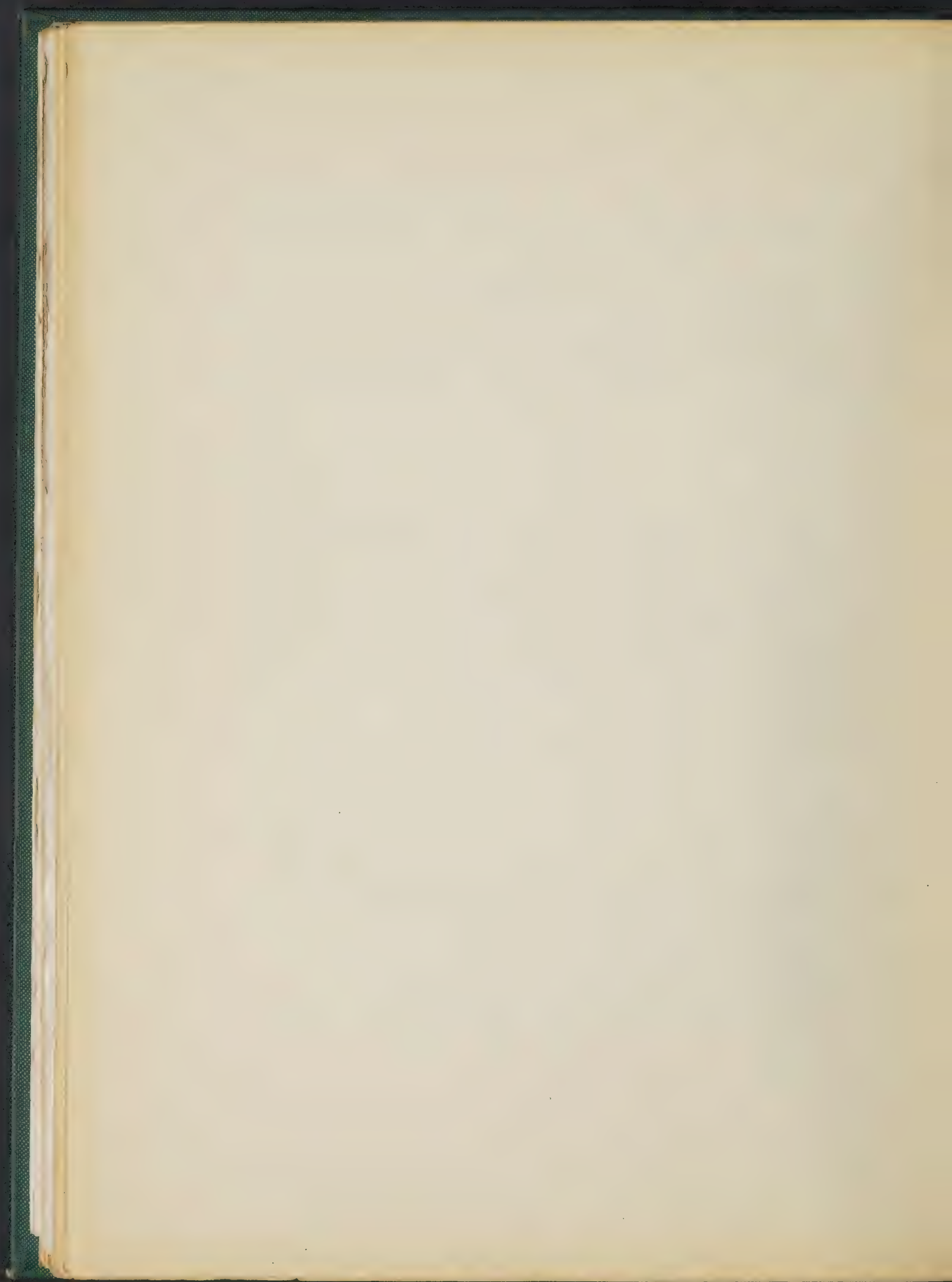
For overdrafts. His sweet abasing sin
Brought hourly on irrevocable doom ;
Till trembling limbs, consuming heart within,
Cried out for simpler pleasures, nor could satisfaction
win.

XXVII.

❧ ❧ ❧ Yet mingled with his pangs had swiftly grown
A vivid joy. As some stern sculptor may
Dream of a mystic shape within his stone,
And execrate the round of night and day,
Till in the block the unveil'd beauty stirs ;
So did young Osrac incarn with his rhyme
The wonders of his soul ; and while the curse
Of harrow'd flesh proclaim'd th' advance of time,
The lives of many were made joyous by his tuneful
chime.

XXVIII.

☪ ☪ ☪ He pieced mad songs of men relentless, strong,
Who mesh'd their manhood in a woman's hair ;
He deified Delusion, and the song
Rang strangely colorable through the murky air ;
His sin obsessed his life, and he could tell



OSRAC, THE SELF-SUFFICIENT.

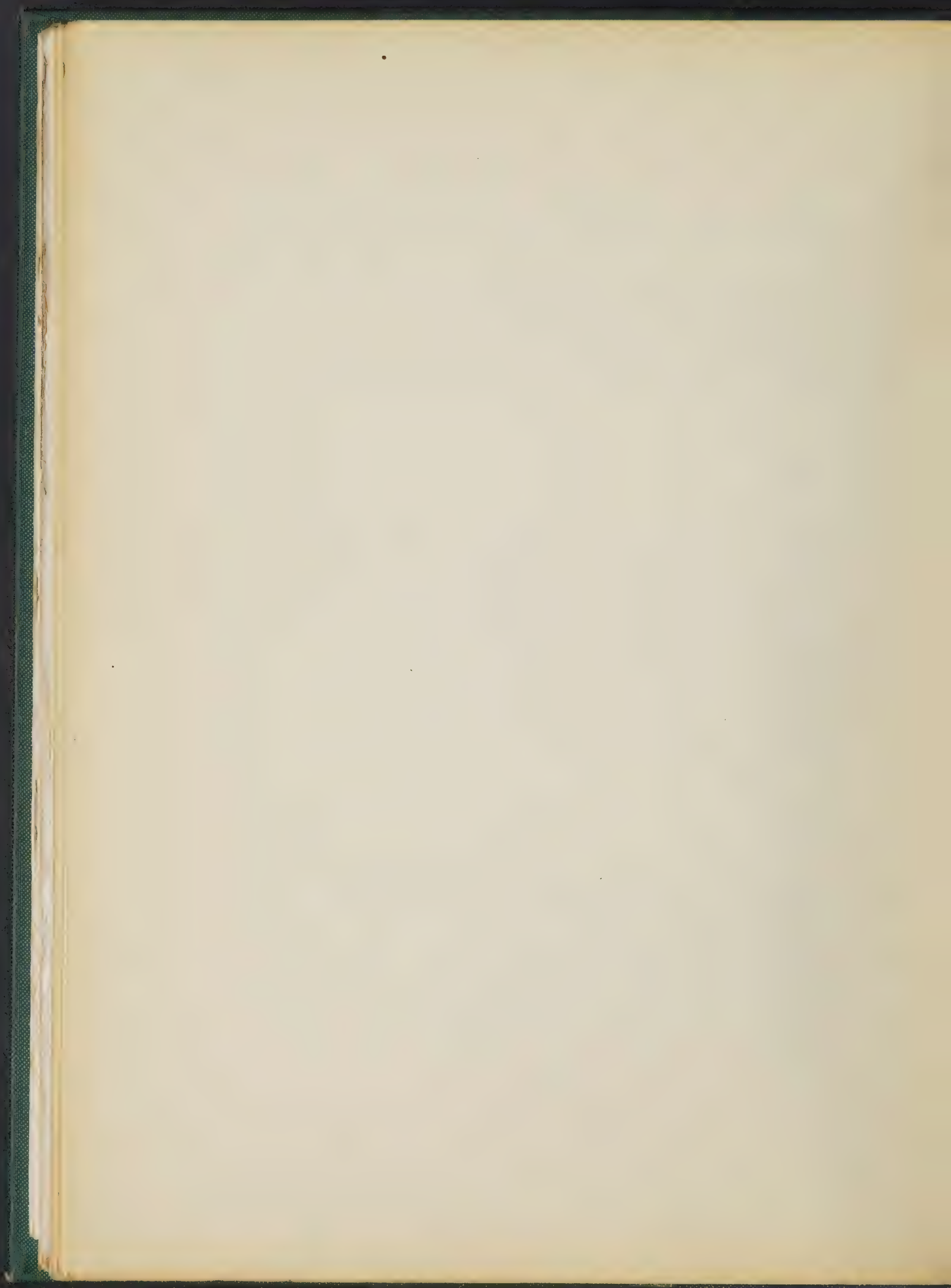
How angelic and how hoggish was each part :
For every gem of thought express'd so well
The torture and the gladness of his heart,
And day by day, and year by year, his constant aim was
—Art.

XXIX.

♣ ♣ ♣ They say he snared young lives, fair Osrac dead ;
They envy him his fame, his sudden rise,—
These cold hard critics, with judicious statutes fed,
Grasp naught of lust, seen with the sinner's eyes.
I knew his limits, saw how weak and wrong
He was in self-appraisment, sensed that sin
Had grip'd him in a hug austere strong.
But had he not been strangely wrought within,
His songs had never reach'd our ears, and poets lacked a
kin.

XXX.

🌸 🌸 🌸 These carpers lie. He was my friend ; to-day
I may look back with elate blushless cheek
Upon that harmony, and re-mark the play
Of fancy on the laughing lips that speak
Of Art and Love : ay, clasp again the hand



OSRAC, THE SELF-SUFFICIENT.

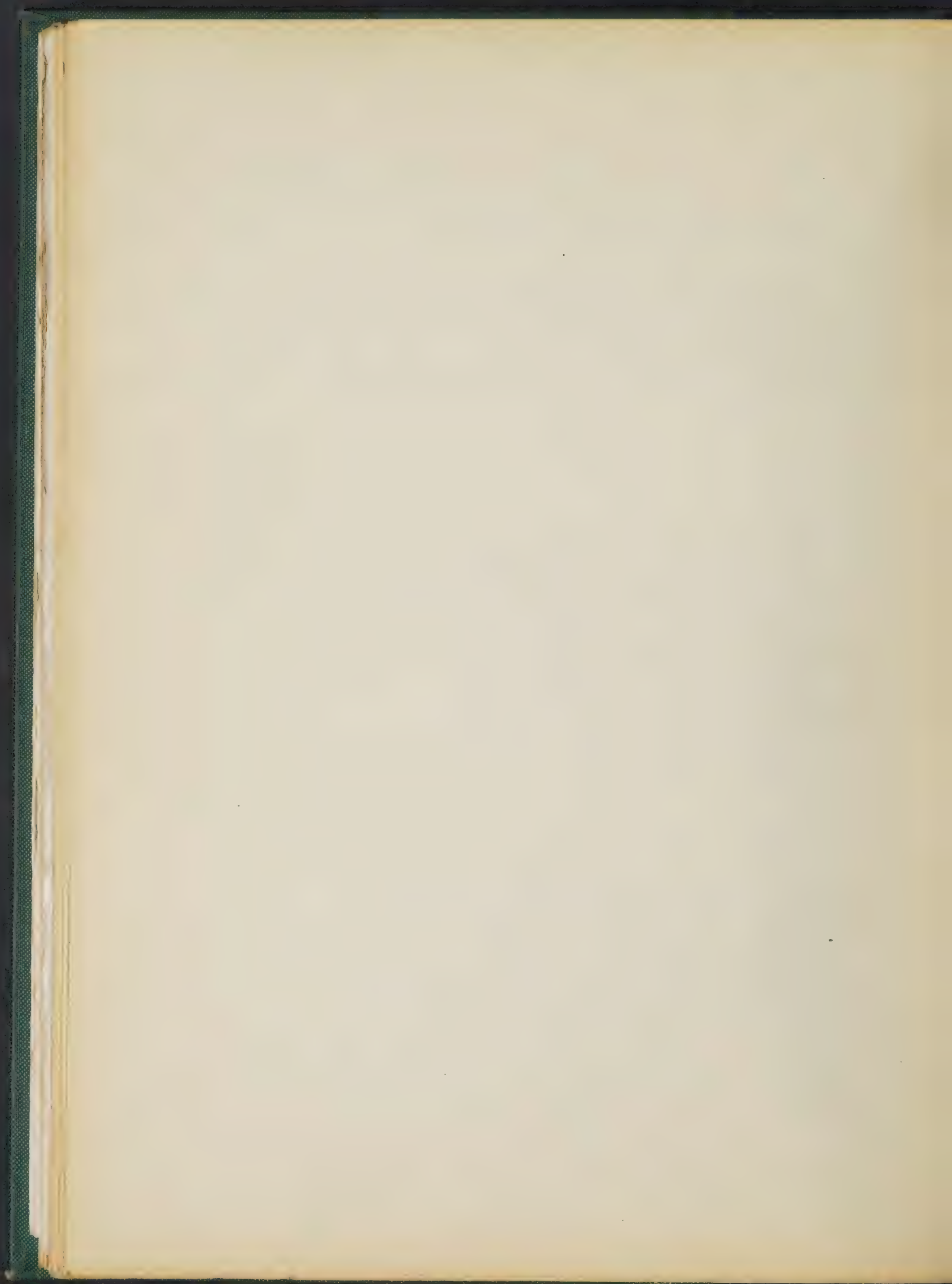
Of Osrac, while our thoughts dear idols find,
In purple riot which both understand ;
My memory is pungent : he was kind,
Courtly and generous : I am to his grosser faults pur-
blind.

XXXI.

☪ ☪ ☪ Ascetic caviller, labouring to compress
In cold clear lines your burden of disdain,
List to my plea ; let these thin words express
In humble measure all his grievous pain :
For I have liv'd within this brain of mine
Some measure of his madness, bitter woe,
Have knelt at Beauty's altar, seen the shine
Of love and ardour in young eyes aglow,
Linger'd in arbours interdicted, where frail flowers blow.

XXXII.

♣ ♣ ♣ Surely the God Who made this plastic brain,
So open to the glamour of fair forms,
Has pity ? I shall never live again
Those perilous days with all their calms and storms
Of wayward passion : nerve and pulse and throb :



OSRAC, THE SELF-SUFFICIENT.

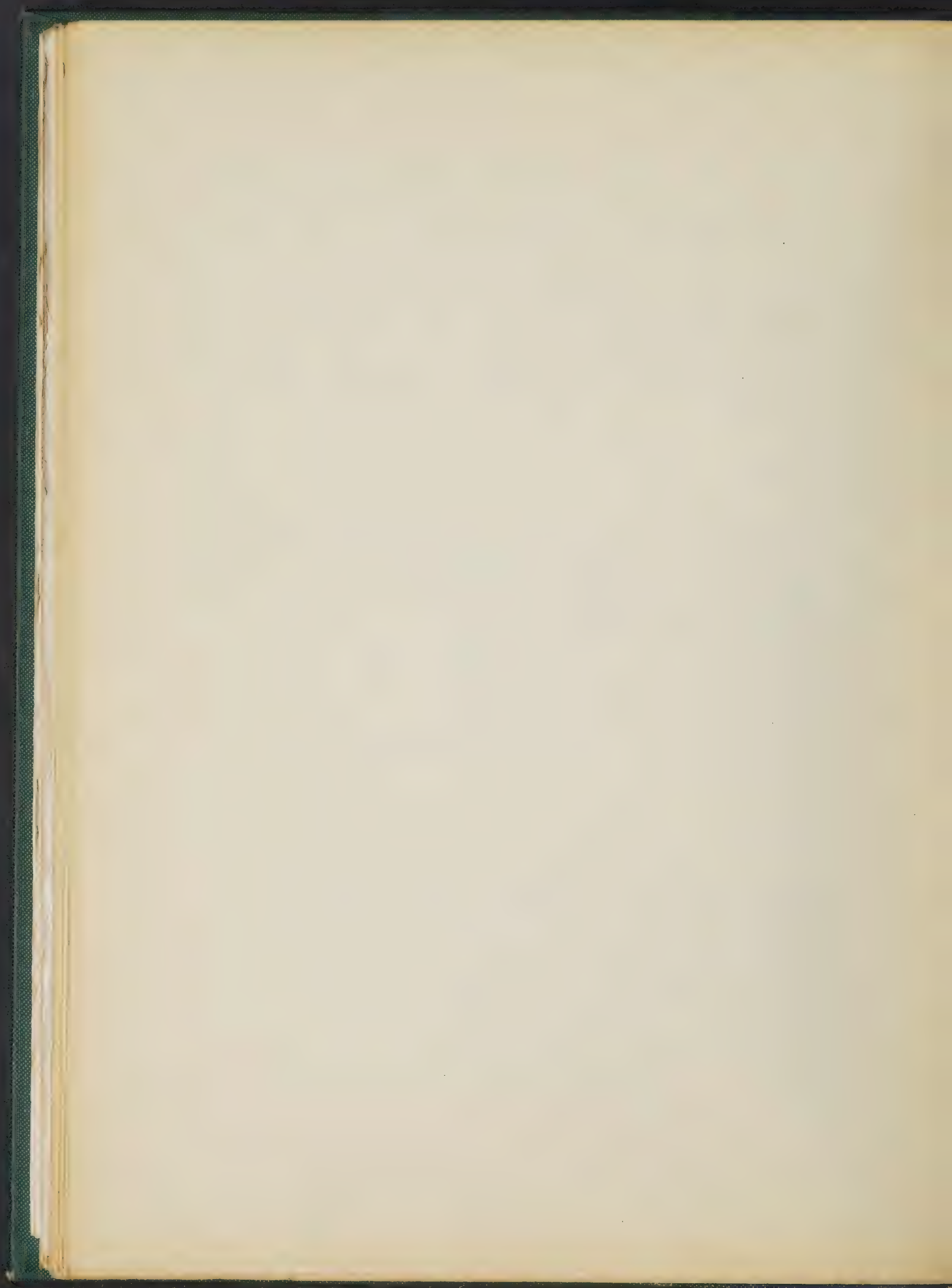
When first I knew the witchery of the hand.
He was a poet,—one whose verses rob
Life of its grayness, point us to a land
As green as Latmos' top, or bright as rare Sicilyan
strand.

XXXIII.

❧ ❧ ❧ This morning I woke late. One moment o'er
I thought that I had dream'd. Dead Osrac stood
Beside my bed, though dappled on the floor
Lay light of sun and leaves. In sorry mood
I heard him speak in accents tender, low :
"The days speed on. Ah ! friend, stand not alone,
Each man is weigh'd according to his show
Of judicatory force. Your love has grown
By tide of years. My debt is paid ; let recompense be
shown."

XXXIV.

❧ ❧ ❧ Five summers have succeeded. Now we stand
Beside his grave, where southern sons are laid.
Daint daffodils are growing at his hand,
And from his ashes roses have been made.
Tread gently, for his quiet bones have rest



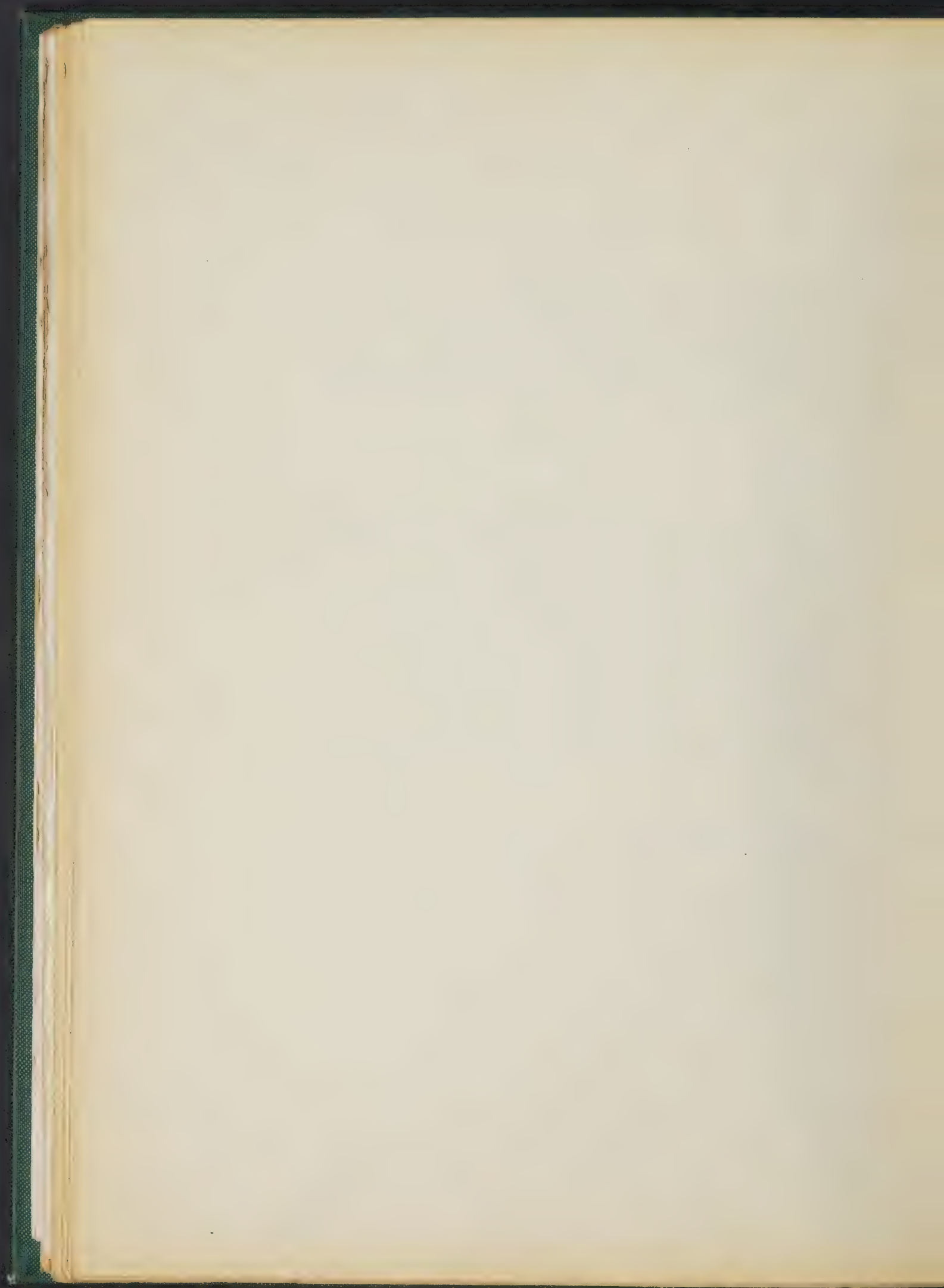
OSRAC, THE SELF-SUFFICIENT.

More manifest than in delirious youth ;
Here 'mong familiar names let his be blest,
Such precious songs he gave the lips of Truth,
We may not lightly judge, nor wish his sins had 'scap'd
their ruth.

XXXV.

♣ ♣ ♣ Osrac ! fair friend, beneath the mellow moon,
Be near me when the nerves in terror prick ;
I take thy pattern as benignant boon
From Love to prove that though the heart be sick,
And all the rose-bloom of our youth retire,
The sensuous mind can wake to surging flame,
In memory of hyacinthine fire.
I whisper low the honey of thy name,
And like a moth expire within the glamour of thy fame.

January—March, 1905.





THE AUTHOR IN 1899.

POEMS
AND
EPIGRAMS.

*Thanks are due to my various Editors for the
re-prints included in these miscellaneous poems.*

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THE PAUSE.

And is this all? Is this rare Love's disguise,
Poor cheeks of snow, red lips and sombre eyes?

I staked my youth, my zest, my all to win,
And reached my manhood ere I cried, "Begin!"

In discontent my soul too long has yearn'd
To crown desire in the fire that burn'd

To nothingness! O eyes I worshipped long,
And wrought so patiently into my song,

Your incense is not sweet enough, for lo!
I have long tasted joys you cannot know!

O hands that flash'd across my dreams in youth
I feel but your disguise, for I had truth!

I to myself sufficed. I could not tire,
For who can limit out the heart's desire?

I heard the maidens crying on the hill,
" Ah ! come and taste of Love in youth, and fill

The hollows of your torpid nights and days
With passion's kisses and her perilous ways."

THIS Love is born in bonds, is desolate,
Fragile and kindly and compassionate.

MY love was born of maniac, scattering joys
More strangely sweet than are your pale annoys.

O, blessedness of innocence ! is this
Your crown and diadem ? An empty kiss !

ROSES AND LILIES.

White flesh and a soul's desire,
Lilies and roses,
Heart's-ease and a soul on fire,
Roses and lilies !
How still is
My heart. It reposes
On lilies and roses.

Virginal flesh and a heart of flame,
Roses and lilies ;
Name that is all in all, I claim
Lilies and roses.
Night closes
Round. Your will is
Roses and lilies.

TO LOVE.

Drop this disguise thou shrivell'd hag ;
I know this hood and cowl beneath
Conceal a maiden form. Bequeath
To debauchee thy draggled rag !

Thy halting pace cannot deceive,
For this I claim as interlude—
I know thee in thy virgin mood
Beauteous and fair beyond belief.

Some see thee as thou now appear'st,
Old, haggard, weary, seared and wan,
And fear thee greatly as thou near'st
The land of eve and setting sun.

Thou, Love, art young, and so can ape
Old Age, inclined to dismal mood.
Ah ! this I claim as interlude—
Young Venus smiles beneath yon cape !

EPIGRAMS :—

ONE LOVE.

Think not the poet loves like common clay,
He woo's his art and to his muse is wed :
Vain all thy words and all that thou canst say—
He takes no other amour to his bed.

RENT.

God, for this world bright and gay,
I in Thy Mansion of Time,
Lovingly, reverently pay
Rent with the run of a rhyme.

THE LADY.

I.

I saw one day in summer
A flower pure and fair ;
Ah ! why when I stooped o'er it
Did sorrow hold me there ?

Was it too pure for wonder,
Too good for human eyes ?
Or did some subtle answer
Leap out to my surmise ?

There was no stain upon it,
And that thought wounded me ;
Ah ! little flower-lady
I dare not worship thee !

II.

Sometimes I sit beside her,
My raptured heart beats fast ;
I say, " Ah ! she is near me,
My own, my own, at last ! "

Oft-times I dare not see her,
Her presence is too dear,
I linger sad and lonely,
And drop a silent tear.

III.

"A Rose to you I give,"
The smiling lover said,
"For, dear, the life you live
Is full of roses red."

She took the blushing rose,
Nor dream'd of hidden thorn—
The treacherous spike that grows
Beneath. Her hands were torn.

But on her breast she laid
The blossom blushing red.
I mark'd it hourly fade
Though by her heart's blood fed.

IV.

I brought a lily pure,
When Passion's flower was dead,
"I bring to you the cure
Of love and pain," I said.

" Place this against your breast,
'Twill heal its smart and ache,
Till night shall bring thee rest
And morrow's dawn shall break."

She took it. All her guile
(Ah ! Death is strong and deep)
Was fled. I saw her smile,
My darling fell asleep.

THE VOICE.

O Voice from out the silences,
Drifting across the sea,
I never knew what silence is
Until you came to me.

My soul exults in harmony,
You cry of love to me,
You whisper of eternity,
O voice from out the sea.

PHANTOM LOVE.

I was alone ; the yearning night,
Moist, fragrant, like a flower
Grew round me and exhaled delight
To bless my one sweet hour.

I stood where, 'mid the green and gold
And opal, near the graves,
The moon cast down her misty fold
In soft ethereal waves.

My dead Love came. She seemed to swerve
Athwart the flickering shine ;
I saw new grace, a lovelier curve
In every secret line.

Fair raptured vision ! Fairy face
And Angel form complete !
O privilege to now embrace
And hold from head to feet !

THE PAST.

Could I but choose again? The past, the past,
Would still be mine with all its grief and pain.
The way of sin is hard and sorrows last;
But joyously I'd grasp my sin again.
For something burns within my heart, a bane
Of those foregone delights which I had ta'en
From out youth's eyes. Oh! I have watch'd the dawn
Break out on rounded faces, and the thought
That love is free has made joy dearly bought
At price like this. Ah! not Oblivion,
Forgetfulness! Give me the memories
Of all I tasted in my youth's desire,
The veins that quickened in a keener fire,—
The ghostly splendour of my Eros' eyes.

APRIL, MAY, JUNE.

Love, when I met you first, I mark'd your eyes
Look out like brooding stars in April skies ;
And when I murmur'd low your baby name
Your words were calm, collected, e'en the same
As they had been in that dim Long Ago.
I stammering spoke—because I loved you so !

Love, when I saw you last, your eyes droop'd down
Before my gaze ; you talk'd of books, the town,
And parried with me in learn'd subtlety
Of modern things. But clearly I could see
That though you veil'd the wonder of your eyes,
You loved me with the ardour of May skies !

And now we meet. You look me through and through
With pride subdued, while the early dew
Of hope is rising. Then a mighty fire
Leaps arrowy from your face. And now Desire
Has combated reserve and won,—your eyes
Meet mine and mate in sun of fair June skies.

THE CHILDLESS.

Oh ! Pity, not condemn, these fallen ones.
How deeply must an erring woman love
Ere she is moved to slay what in her runs,—
The little lives unborn that softly move
Within her,—and dare never let see light !
Can she forget those early feeble throes
Of hope maternal ? and the thought that she
Might love a child ? God's Pity only knows
The anguish of the bounden. We are free.

LOVE AND LUST.

The bright inviolate hair
Of ruddy Lust I saw,
And she was passing fair
And well worth dying for.

Her eyes were eyes of flame,
Her breasts were breasts of fire ;
And I breathed low her name
In ecstasy of desire.

"Love," they say, "is pain,
And many die for her ;
To perish I am fain,
If Love as she is fair."

I saw that Love was fair,
And cherished, did not slay ;
I turned from the ruddy hair
Of Lust, to Love away.

" See thou my breasts of snows,
Where wind is never rude ;
Here is a fragrant rose,
Here peace and solitude."

Pale is my Love, and dear,
As cold as moon i' the night ;
But I worship without fear,
And bend to her nebulous light.

THE MONK.

I am a monk, who in a lonely cell
Prays long and earnestly before his cross,
And strains his inward vision to the stars
While the night deepens ; and in anguish cries
" O Christ, man celibate, and God of all,
Annihilate in me all taint of sin."
Yet sees before him beauteous witching shapes,
Who in his ears cry Love and Love and Love,
While in the under-chambers of his mind,
Are verdant hills and valleys, flowing streams.

Ah ! 'tis a mood, and as a mood 'tis fled.
I am myself. I can resume my tale—
Take up the fabric of my alien days
For sweet Love's sake. Hark ! from out yonder room
A dear voice cheers me with its carollings.

AFTERWARDS.

"Yes, she is wed, the people say,
With smug and placid look,
I saw him with her yesterday,
She dallied with a book.

Her eyes looked at me fearfully—
What consciousness was this?
A sudden flush ran over me:
Did she recall that kiss?

Ah! They are married: all is well!
But in her haunted eyes
Are thoughts too deep for lips to tell
And clinging memories.

SAMIE.

The moonlight had flashed out a stream
Of white and of green o'er the sea,
And the air was an odorous dream
Up-built for you and for me.
Under our feet as we walked
The sand croon'd in plaintive desire,
A pepper-bird coo'd as we talked,
And the stars were bulbs of white fire.

Ocean and moon and a bird,
Dusky Queen Samie and I ;
The night-wind our whisperings heard
And breath'd her sweet name to the sky.
The pulse of the silence beat on :
Love, love, desire,—ah, dear heart,
My conscience cried, " Let us begone,
We must part."
My soul cried, " Let us begone,
Dear love, dear love, we must part."

ADA.

In our little murky street,
When rain fell fast,
And the sound of slushy feet
Meander'd past.
Ada sat and smiled and croon'd
All the day ;
Murk and mire assuaged her wound—
She felt gay !

Should we laugh and cry aloud,—
Keeping holiday ;
Should we bend o'er infant, proud,
On its natal day,
Showing keen delight,—a tear
In Ada's eye
Would glisten, and in awful fear
She would sigh !

Ada cried when we had mirth,
She was crazed ;
Sin had vaunted at her birth,
She was mazed.
Ah ! But, method rules the hour :
Should we laugh—or cry ?
Life is full of secret power,
Let us sigh !

EPIGRAMS :—

TRANSFIGURATION.

Within the bosom of the poet prest,
Dry, scentless leaves find shelter and a rest ;
But as the warm blood through his body flows,
They rise and blossom in a new-born rose.

CYNICISM.

From Helicon's stream a draught would once inspire
The bard to sing in sweet ecstatic flight ;
But poets of this sordid age require
A draft on Parr's, made " payable at sight."

IN TUNE.

As a bell in a chime
Sets its relative ringing,
So one poet's rhyme
Wakes his comrade to singing.

THE MAN OF THE CROWD.

Amid the noise of loud and clam'rous streets
He stands alone, unmoved, stern and cold,
His hands thrust deep in pockets ; on his face
The scorn of pomp and ostentatious wealth.
From earliest youth his tainted soul is filled
With the black guilt of his environment.
Some days he toils with arduous hands, the sweat
Breaking in sullen drops from his dark brow.
Others, he merely stands and scorning looks
On the gay throng that passes ever by.
Who gave that furrow to his brow, that frown
Above the eyes that gaze askance at life ?
What social system ruined his respect,
And made him hate where God ordained Love ?
He studies human nature from his place,
His mind conceives a great contempt of power.
He dreams his blood-red dreams of discontent,
The while his fingers twitch to grasp a throat.
What scarlet is to an enraged bull
So to him is the well-dressed man of town.

Contemptuously he deems that coward heart
Must always beat beneath a broadcloth coat.
He loathes the woman with her scented hair,
Her smiling face, and well-cut Bond Street gown.
His cramp'd existence, jaundiced vision, make
Him despise all these social butterflies. . . .
Ah ! masters, this is England's master-piece—
Our menace, danger, and our long reproach !

DESIRE.

I may not possess the soul
O body sweet and pure,
For when I have paid the toll,
The spirit would not endure ;
And if I yearn'd to keep
The spirit clean to me
I know your love would sleep
For lack of ecstasy.
I may not have you whole,
Body and soul and flame,
I must renounce the soul,
When I the body claim.

THE AFTERMATH.

The child is mine, and from my flesh he came,
Blood of my blood is he, flame of my flame ;
Welded by Nature's links, challeng'd by sentinel Death,
Fed by my dearest thoughts, or ever he drew breath.
The child is mine.

A thousand men have lived and loved for him,
For olden wrongs lurk, wolf-like, dark and grim,
Behind him : pain, desire and sin's dark ban
Bestrode his path before his life began,
But,—the child is mine.

Not all the turbulence of the poignant past,
Nor all the midnight secrets that o'ercast
His little soul's clear purity can charm
The fact away. Come death, come storm or calm,
The child is mine.

A SEA PICTURE.

All stealthily the sea creeps in,
The sea-gulls wing with weirder cry,
As down the bay the boats skim by,
Like souls releas'd from secret sin.

Night breezes from the coast-line rush ;
The sky is hazed with ruddier gold,
As though a lover over-bold
Had waked his paramour to blush.

The prospect fades in bluer gray,
While clouds array'd in lilac dress
Reflect the sun's last ruddiness,
And breathe the psalm of parting day.

Swifter the mists enshroud, and flows
The tide in purls so stealthily :
What can there be 'twixt you and me
O flush of cheeks,—O damask rose ?

SUMMER, 1895.

❧ ❧ ❧ " I am ill, miserable, tired—how I suffer I cannot tell you, but life seems a weary burden."

Letter from Wandsworth Gaol, August, 1895.

I.

Gray pallid dawn, forgotten of the sun,
Drifting weird clouds across a tent of sky ;
Then sudden darkness, long harsh night begun,
What bird could call to bid the day " Good-bye ? "

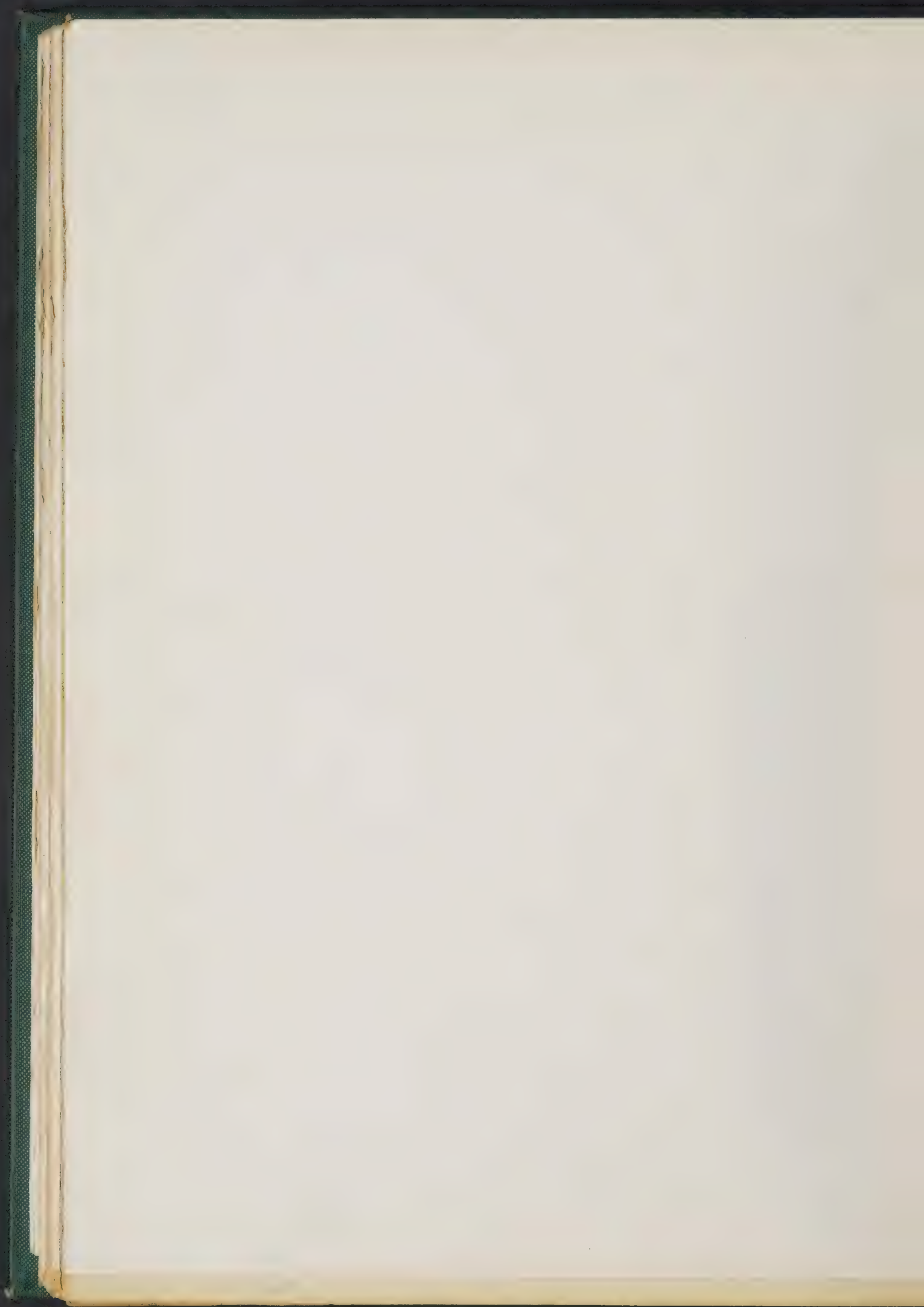
Dawns thus, nights thus, and never a change,
This tedious while of weeks in the dead year :
A butterfly in the tainted light looks strange,
A birth unnatural in a world so drear.

No pulse of vibrant Nature beats and thrills
Within these walls where vilest weeds are born ;
Here is the acid humid air that kills,
And rusts the soul, the while the heart is worn.



OSCAR WILDE IN 1900.

(From a rough sketch by Ernst Taberner).



II.

Frangible is life, and here no roses blow ;
Creatures but sigh, and sigger out their day
In abject pain, the like man may not know
Who has not given his better self away.

What gain results from grim and gnarring age ?
Mark how the dismal days drag wearily :
This is our vaunted justice ! How assuage
The heart-ache of this soul's mad misery ?

For all this time he knows where, too far hence,
Through earth's pure pores the year's young life leaps forth :
Where air is drunken with a quickening sense,
Where sky of blue is east, west, south and north.

Where, diamond-deck'd the dew shines on the grass,
In trembling adoration of the sun,
Who soon in all his majesty will pass
From out his rosy-curtain'd pavilion.

Where snow-white lilies, blushing at the marge,
And rose-carnations, tinged with amethyst,
Crowding upon the sunny acres large
Are peering forth in thousands, sunshine kiss'd.

III.

O angel-flowers, whose scents fresh, mystic, coy,
Close in the heart like childhood's earliest hope,
Give him your secret and your faithful joy,—
Lend him th' allurements of your verdant slope.

Ah, give him ease. Beneath the ruddy shield
Of the bright sky the summer blossoms gleam ;
The larks have nested in the unmown field,
And rise in rapture near the elfin stream.

Young children, greedy for the flowers, make haste
For nosegays which the busy fields hold out ;
Your world is full of flowers, enough to waste,
For as you scatter down the buds you pout.

Dear Osrac, dark is Wandsworth Gaol to-day,
Your life lags numbed. But Pity's fragrant urn
Is broken for your sake, and I, who pay
Sin's tribute, am thy brother and may mourn.

REMEMBRANCE.

" Forget, forget,
And ne'er regret,"
Cries to my heart the bird of the night ;
If mad dreams at eve and regrets by day,
If all the anguish a soul can pay
Are price that has purchased a sorrow's blight,
I will forget.

Say, say,
Flower o' May,
What didst thou pay for the cuckoo's tune,
Or, Rose, for the nightjar's song to the moon ?
Happy is thy virgin bosom,
Fragile is thy choicest blossom ;
Thou'rt fancy-free,
More glad than he,
Let me forget.

Twine, twine,
Tenacious vine,
Clasp in thy arms the form of thy love.
Whisper ye leaves as ye lightly rove ;
Plead with the night,
And play with the light,
While I forget.

SATIETY.

Too much of women, too much of love,
But the world's here, and the sea's near,
And God is above !

Too much of pleasure, too much of pain,
But the bird sings, and the wood rings,
And dreams are still wove.

Too much of wisdom, too much of grief,
But the sun shines, and the heart pines
For province of love.

Too much of laughter, too much of tears,
And 'tis good-night with a new light,
Though world may reprove.

A MISTY EVENING.

The world is dead, and cold,
And only tremors flit
Across my soul. 'Tis writ
In some book, turgid, old,
That man is but a shadow
Within a world of dreams.

Here in the murky street,
'Neath moon, pallid and thin,
The beat of monotonous feet
Comes welling and surging in—
Man and shadow and dream,
World and dream and shadow !

The day has been one of rain,
All night the roofs have drip'd,
All day has my solace been pain,
All night shall my soul be whip'd,—
Man and dream and shadow,
World and shadow and dream !

I am weary of tears, all tears,
I pine for my heart's desire,
A runner lost 'mid the spears
Of pursuers, and windy fire—
Man and shadow and dream,
World and dream and shadow !

I would wash in the cleansing flood,
Runs to th' eternal sea,
I long for green solitude,
For birds in a sighing tree,—
Man and dream and shadow,
World and shadow and dream.

THE STREET.

Here in the streets? Good God! What's this?
I danced at her bridal a year ago!
(Your husband was harsh and you tired of bliss,
And life is a gamble, an empty show?)

The same bright face, but rouge on her cheeks;
She fingers her rings and laughs the while,
The same sweet voice of violets speaks,
But jars a little with slang and guile.

(A year ago you were boasted of all,
I drink with you here as a "friend" to-night :)
As honoured guest I danced at her ball,
And she has gone down! What a sorry plight!

Fragile and pure, creamy white and rose,—
(There's lodgings to pay and a girl must live?
There's bangles and theatres, money and those
Trifles that lovers were once wont to give?)

But to-morrow? (What matter! It's all in your right!)
She says it with laughter and tears in her eyes.
'Tis perfum'd day and a doubtful night—
And an earthly hell and a Paradise!

TO THE DEAD POET.

O thou ! serenely dead, amid the throng
Of tuneless poets in a sordid town,
Each wild and wistful harbinger of song
Was near thee smiling when thy thoughts were sown.

Thy songs were sweet : thy lays were ever glad,
In thy fresh lines were bee and bird and tree ;
And when thou sang'st of sorrow we were sad,
For fiction did not thrall,—'twas real to thee.

Among the reeds intimately lied'st thou,
Anear the roots of radiant flowers that thrust
Aloft their heads. And thou upon the bough
Wert sure of home, and feared'st not distrust.

The silent labour of the patient rain
Was to thy tuneful measure reconciled ;
The little life of Autumn's pregnant grain
Was incarnate within thy sonnet mild.

Nature is sister to thee now and tells
Thee all her secrets, all her sorrow's burden ;
The lily budding from thy breast compels
The benediction of our freer pardon.

I look at life with clearer, calmer eyes,
No place there is that does not breathe thy name.
Some gracious word of thine opes Paradise
And fills the mind with iridescent flame.

Dead Osrac, take my little halting song,
Thou wert my friend, and all my passion now
Is mingled with the listless passing throng ;
And mingled with my life and death art thou.

THE UNLOVED.

Alas ! for those who pass away unloved,
Through whose cool veins no shaft of Eros moved
In swift desire ; whose hearts were ever cold
Through lack of love ; who faltered, too soon old,
Upon Death's brink, and looking in the glass
Saw Love and Pain and Joy and Beauty pass
Unknown away.

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